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THE PAWNS OF FATE

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BY

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"LADY BEATRIX AND THE FORBIDDEN MAN," "SIR ANTHONY AND THE EWE LAMB," ETC.

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IN GRATITUDE

THE PAWNS OF FATE

CHAPTER I

Sir Æneas loved a lady.

He had taken a long time about it, since he was thirty before the little god got hold of him at all . . . but—when he was thirty, the grip came, a firm strong grip, and the little god held him.

Sir Æneas loved a lady. (It's a way men have.) She made a fool of him. (It's a way women have sometimes.)

She made a fool of him—a Monteith! And such a public, well-advertised fool as she made of him too! The whole social world had known of their engagement, and he had been so very proud of it, and of her, who—sweet whilst the time lasted—finally spared him no mortification; jilted him in the most heartless way, and at the very last moment. She actually

let him wait for her, on their wedding-day, in the midst of a big congregation of their mutual acquaintance, at St. George's, Hanover Square.

When her father finally reached that church, discomfited to the verge of an apoplexy, poor old gentleman! mortified and furious—he sent for his quasi-prospective son-in-law, who—in keenest anxiety—hurried to the vestry. There a letter from the bride was handed to him. (She was a bride right enough, though not his.) With a long travelling-coat over her wedding-dress, she had evaded everybody at the last instant, and slipped off to marry someone else.

"I didn't mean to do this," she wrote, "I really did not! I meant to go through with it, and I should, if Jack and I had not met again last week; but since I saw him it has been torture. I still tried though, and it was only yesterday morning that I definitely agreed to go. Then we didn't know what to do! Had I told—instead of running away—my father, you all, would have been so angry! But I'm afraid this has put you in an unpleasant position; do be as nice as you can about it. I am

very sorry; and *so* sorry if you really mind about me. . . ."

"Heavens! 'Go through with it.' 'Unpleasant position.' 'Sorry if you really mind!'"

Could he but have viewed it in that way, Sir Æneas had a great escape. The Jock O'Hazeldean—whom she married by special licence—lived to learn the truth of the proverb, "Marry in haste and repent at leisure!"

* * * * *

From a child Æneas Monteith had been delicate, and morbidly sensitive—too delicate and sensitive for school, his parents had decided—so he was robbed of the moral training school gives, and became domineering and tyrannical.

During his courtship and engagement he for the first time in his life, was not self-centred; and his love for that lady had a wonderfully softening influence upon him, and might have altered his whole character, had the newly developing spirit of kindliness not been nipped in the bud.

He shook himself mentally and endeavoured not to care—but he did care. She had cut him to the quick.

He wrote and congratulated her upon her histrionic powers—they were great. On the eve of the wedding they had spent the afternoon together; and before going off, as custom demands, to dine his best man and a party of others, he had held her face between his hands, and kissed her lips—with an almost sacred reverence. He now contemplated the manner in which she took that kiss; she took it sweetly and quite naturally. Undoubtedly her histrionic powers were great.

Well! He also would develop histrionic aptitudes—not less remarkable than hers. No one, he vowed, should ever see or guess his mortification; the outside world should think it mattered as little to him as to her. In pursuance of this plan of defiance he came to town each season, and occupied his house in Grosvenor Square. If not a genial host, his entertainments were upon a magnificent scale; others were enabled to be gay at his expense; and, of course, he was a great *parti*. Season after season, however, he foiled the designing matrons who laid snares for him, and retired at the end of June to the quiet of country life, and to the society of his books.

He was singularly and pathetically aloof and apart from all that was going on around him; and the low opinion he had formed of human nature, his constant suspicion of people, was pathetic too. In London, amongst all the pageant of persons by whom he was surrounded, who enjoyed what he could provide, Sir Æneas did not believe that there was one who—had he been a poor man—would have cared whether he lived or died; not one "whose hand he clasped and hailed him by the name of friend." Yet the ideal of friendship haunted his mind and fascinated him.

Friendship he felt must surely be a remarkable and a desirable thing. Even in the writing of his favourite Greek authors constant reference was made to its value. Did not Euripides state that it is good to be rich, good to be strong, but better to be beloved of many friends! and Cicero declared that "Friendship is the only thing in the world concerning the usefulness of which all mankind are agreed." Yet friendship entails confidence, whereas each day seemed to bring fresh proof of the perfidy of human beings.

CHAPTER II

Sir Æneas Monteith and Sybil Colquhoun met, for the first time, at a dinner-party. She was then twenty-one years of age—a brilliant young creature, very sweet and natural, with a quite astonishing power of sympathy: instinctive, impulsive, and impressionable; keen to protect the sad and unfortunate.

Sir Æneas appealed to that mothering instinct immediately. Before they were introduced, Sybil's quick eyes had noted the tall, slightly stooping figure—the rather narrow chest; the thin aristocratic face—lined, and with a curious something about the mouth—was it a droop or a twist of the lips?—which she did not understand, but which certainly seemed wrong and unhappy. She was still considering him, and wondering, when he approached with their host; then she learned his name, and that he was to take her in to dinner.

With an astonishing belief in her own powers (for she was only twenty-one) she rejoiced at that, telling herself that she would very soon alter the unsatisfactory expression.

The expression, however, remained *un*-altered, although Sir Æneas (for him) enjoyed his evening, and talked a great deal more than usual. Sybil had stumbled quickly upon his main interest—his passion for everything Greek—Greek thought, literature, art, architecture. It did not bore her, she assured him—far from that! She loved Greece too, and had spent some years there, when her father went to Athens as Minister. She was glad to be reminded of it all. So Sir Æneas talked, and became interested to the point of drawing with his fork upon the table-cloth—a reconstructed temple of Heliopolis.

It was quite remarkable.

"Who is Sir Æneas Monteith? and why so stern and sad-looking?" Sybil asked her aunt, as they drove together back to that lady's house in Lowndes Square.

"He is a disagreeable person, I think," Lady Colquhoun had answered. "'A man of property.'"

She shrugged her shoulders—Lady Colquhoun had always rather a disdainful way with her.

"Once there was a tremendous talk about him—he was to have been married. Dear me! that's thirty years ago, or more—I was a girl at the time, I recollect. . . ."

And then she gave a description of that scene in St. George's Church, winding up with "It's a pity she treated him so badly, it made him more acid than ever; at the time of his engagement he was quite pleasant and human."

"I call it awful," said Sybil. "Poor man! how it must have hurt, to have the foundations of everything kicked from under him like that—that explains his mouth, of course."

"His mouth!" Lady Colquhoun turned, and gave a little laugh which was meant to be bracing. "My dear child, don't take other people's troubles to heart in that way."

The light of the carriage-lamps had shown Sybil's face greatly distressed, and her voice had held an absurd amount of feeling . . . Lady Colquhoun was not accustomed to that kind of thing, and was rather afraid of it. She

did not know her niece at all well, and feared that she was an emotional young person.

Although twenty-one years of age, this was, curiously enough, the first time that Sybil had ever been in London during a season. She was the only child of the late Lord Colquhoun, and his profession as a diplomat had led to her spending much of her life abroad. Her father died when she was nineteen; her mother had died eight years before, and she had been brought up, educated, and chaperoned by an excellent, but somewhat acrid, German lady named Fräulein Brentmann. The loss of her father was a most bitter blow to Sybil; for many months she had been inconsolable, and often still preferred to wander with Fräulein Brentmann about the Continent—seeing pictures, hearing music, living quietly; nor would she be persuaded to visit her relations.

Of these she, indeed, had singularly few. The uncle and aunt with whom she was now staying, and one cousin—the son of her father's sister—ended the list on the Colquhoun side; and a violent family quarrel having separated her from her mother's people, they, so to speak, did not count.

Youth—which lives for the future—is seldom crushed for long by grief, however poignant. Sybil's spirits were naturally high, and in this interval of two years they had completely reasserted themselves. Once established in Lowndes Square, on a month's visit, she began to revel in the feeling of kinship, and rejoiced that the excellent but repressing Fräulein should be safe in Berlin.

"Uncle Willie," now become Lord Colquhoun, was, however, much more attractive to Sybil than his lady—who was cynically inclined, stiff morally and physically; laced (so her niece thought, as she contemplated that firm, hour-glass figure) in stays so effective that they gave an impression of armour, and seemed to keep her rigidly apart from folly and frivolity in the rest of the world.

"By the way, Sybil," Lady Colquhoun said one morning, "we have people dining with us to-night, you remember; and your protégé Sir Æneas Monteith is among them."

"I'm *so* glad," came heartily enough to cause Lord Colquhoun to look up, in spite of an absorbed interest in his breakfast.

"What ?"he questioned in surprise.

"Sybil finds Sir Æneas interesting," his wife remarked, in that chilly little way of hers—not unkindly at all, but with a half-amused condescension which was a trifle annoying.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Uncle Willie.

Sybil laughed.

"I like him very much," she declared. "Do like him, Uncle Willie. If you like him, and he thinks you like him, you'll find he is really ever so much nicer than you know!"

Certainly Sybil's quite genuine pleasure at seeing her new acquaintance again did thaw him. Nevertheless, when she moved away—having greeted Sir Æneas—his curious narrow eyes—which followed her furtively—held no warmth of interest.

The talk at dinner turned upon a certain case in Italy that had excited public attention—some persons declaring that the position and wealth of the culprit, had enabled him to evade the punishment which must have overtaken a poor man.

"Timeo Danaos!" Sybil heard her uncle whisper to his neighbour—for Sir Æneas was quoting Anacharsis, who, it seemed, has likened

"written laws in all respects to spider's webs, which would, like them, only entangle and hold the poor and weak, while the rich and powerful easily broke through them."

They discussed Sir Æneas Monteith again at breakfast the next morning.

"Now, Uncle Willie, own up!" said Sybil, "and don't mock Anacharsis. It was a very apt and interesting quotation; it showed 'the ancients borrowing from the moderns, once again! In my humble opinion Sir Æneas has a remarkable memory. Fräulein would say that 'is ap ŭnd indelligent eellusdrations, add piquancy to zee converzation!' You have yet to meet my Fräulein, and her beautifully rounded guttural periods. The good Fräulein seldom relaxes; compared to hers, Sir Æneas's style is slipshod."

"He's found a champion, anyhow, I see," laughed her uncle.

A few days later Sybil was invited to join a picnic-party—got up, in point of fact, for her benefit by her new friend. Seated on the box-seat of the coach, and herself a good whip, she greatly admired his handling of the ribands; for the greys required some driving. They

went down to Virginia Water, and Sybil thought Sir Æneas really looked happier; had a jauntier and a younger air. His light-coloured top-hat was set upon his head at quite a rakish little angle: he wore a carnation in his button-hole (that, had she but known it, was nothing unusual), and he made one or two jokes . . . shockingly feeble jokes . . . but there! jokes! . . . Wasn't it capital? He really seemed happier.

On the return journey Sybil, who had been first to be called for, was the last to be dropped. Sir Æneas drove her to Lowndes Square, and she stood for a moment or two patting the horses' heads, then, going back to the coach, she looked up and thanked him for the pleasant day. He bent from his seat towards her tall, lithe figure and made a pretty speech—somewhat stilted perhaps; but none the less a pretty speech.

"It is altogether charming—invigorating, rejuvenating—Miss Colquhoun, to come across someone who enjoys life as you do. It is I who should thank you—who *do* thank you immensely for your company. . . ."

There was nobody in the square, so she

dropped a curtsey, facing him with laughter in her eyes. It was so funny somehow.

"I've enjoyed myself tremendously," she said, "and I *shall* say thank you for it. Good-bye just now, Sir Æneas; we shall meet again soon I'm sure."

Just as she was about to vanish into the house she turned, with a little wave of her hand. Sir Æneas kept the light top-hat raised from his head until the door closed.

CHAPTER III

THE Monteiths like the Colquhouns, dealt in small families and a dearth of relatives. Mount Flotten—which had been theirs for over five hundred years—Droon Castle, and certain other properties (all unentailed) Sir Æneas proposed to leave—with the main part of a very large fortune—to his nearest relative, to whom also the baronetcy in natural course would go. This next of kin was his first cousin Leslie Monteith, a Judge of the Scotch Courts, and the father of one son, who bore the old family name of Æneas.

The younger Æneas Monteith proposed to follow in his father's legal footsteps, although he had been called to the English and not to the Scottish Bar. At Eton and the University he had done very well, and had especially distinguished himself in debates at the Union. He possessed in no small measure the Celtic

fluency of utterance, and there was a talk of his standing at the next General Election as candidate for Flotten in the Conservative interest. He was keenly looking forward to that possibility himself, since his bent for politics was strong.

Each year from his boyhood upwards, young Æneas had spent some part of holiday-time with his elderly relative, the head of the family. His frank ways and independence of opinion made him as much a favourite with Sir Æneas as anyone could be. Certainly he and Mr. Alexander Forbes, agent for the Scotch properties, were the only two persons whom Sir Æneas did not regard with any suspicion. He had never, he told himself, caught either of these men designing means for their own profit. Young Æneas's interest in any improvements or alterations at Flotten, was never greater than bare politeness demanded; so that a strange jealousy of possession, which was strong in Sir Æneas, became lulled under the comforting conviction that the question of succession had not suggested itself, nor been suggested to his kinsman.

It was Lady Monteith, that young man's

own mother, who by a foolish thoughtless little speech, upset the trend of her son's fortunes.

It happened about the time that Sir Æneas had made Sybil Colquhoun's acquaintance, within a week of the picnic to Virginia Water.

He went to Edinburgh for a couple of days on business, and he walked in to luncheon at his cousin's house in Moray Place. Lord Monteith was sitting in Court, and Lady Monteith, always gracious and kindly, did her best alone for the none too easy guest.

They spoke about her son. It was her pet theme. She was so exceedingly proud of him. . . . His father was much pleased, she said, by the accounts they had. Æneas showed a faculty for grasping the points of a case rapidly, and for stating them clearly; so he was getting work. Wasn't that delightful?

Lady Monteith waxed eloquent, and, alas! a trifle indiscreet. She passed on from Æneas's chances of being adopted as a candidate, to his chances of winning back the seat if so adopted. Then, in the interest of the subject, forgot the caution she should have maintained, and implied, although ever so vaguely, that the people

of Flotten should take a very special interest in this candidature. She certainly did imply, albeit ever so vaguely, that Mount Flotten itself might one day be his.

Sir Æneas was quick to notice that. His cold eyes furtively surveyed the animated lady at the head of the table.

Designs again! always designs! and said he to himself: "I shall have none of this counting on dead men's shoes."

"I am particularly sorry not to see Leslie," he announced.

"Leslie will be so sorry too."

"I wished," said Sir Æneas—and this time he watched his quarry deliberately not furtively —"I wished to tell him of my approaching marriage."

It was a veritable bolt from the blue.

"Really—oh! how very delightful—how very interesting."

Lady Monteith bravely endeavoured to throw a tone of pleasure into her voice, but omitted to be sufficiently interested to inquire the lady's name, which, under the circumstances was as well. Sir Æneas noted the effort and smiled.

"I want a son of my own to succeed me," he said with cruel directness.

"Of course you do; naturally you must."

He spared her nothing.

"I was sure you would thoroughly appreciate that feeling," he said; and smiled again—with unpleasant cynicism.

The shaft delivered, and pushed home, Sir Æneas went on his way; leaving Lady Monteith to weep into the cushions till the Court rose at four o'clock, and she was able to transfer her attentions to the broad shoulders of her husband—and find the consolation that heaven has provided in such places. Æneas, their beloved son! The very light of her eyes!

"If he were going to marry why wait till now? Oh, Leslie, Leslie! I can't help hoping he'll have a miserable time of it—and no son!"

Above her bent head the Judge smiled at this, but after an instant—"There, there!" he said, and actually—for Lord Monteith was not demonstrative—he raised his wife's head and imprinted a little kiss upon her forehead.

"Dry your eyes, my dear woman! One

mustn't say 'I told you so,' but I have often warned you; and the boy and I have never counted on all this as you have done. Moreover, it's perhaps more wholesome for a young fellow not to have great expectations. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

So then, Sir Æneas was going to be married—"To take to himself a wife." He put it in that way, asked himself "whose wife?" and smiled at the chestnut. Yes, he was going to marry; he must do it now. It would be easy enough to secure a wife; but the only person to whom he felt in any way drawn was Sybil Colquhoun; and in his own mind he had some doubt as to whether Sybil would accept him. He had not misconstrued her friendliness, that would have been difficult; she was so very open.

Sir Æneas, before his talk with Lady Monteith, had had no idea whatsoever of marrying this girl; but now the more he thought of it, the more he wished for it. Indeed, as he realized the uncertainty of her reply, he began positively to long that it should be in the affirmative. He could not recollect having

been so anxious over anything in his life before, nor so impatient for a settlement.

At once on his return to London, he called in Lowndes Square, merely to find that Sybil had left her uncle's house, and had gone to visit a friend, whose home was a quiet Rectory tucked into a hollow of the Sussex Downs. He discovered the name of the nearest town and station, and pursued her; driving over in a fly.

It was much the most effective thing he could have done; it was extraordinarily effective.

His arrival happened to be on a rather showery afternoon, after a wet morning. The Rector's daughter was taking a needlework-class at the schools; and Sybil, declaring that she must get some exercise, had put on a short skirt and thick boots, and set off for a tramp, her only companion being a lazy white bull-dog. The fact that he could be induced by her to go for walks, was considered so marvellous that she made a point of taking him.

She had reached the downs, following the road, since the ground was so wet. The wind had caught her hair—it was not faultlessly tidy—and put into her cheeks a little more

colour than she usually had; for hers was the milky skin that goes with auburn hair and grey eyes. She felt well and happy, and rejoiced in watching the low clouds, driven and hurried by these blustering winds. She stood still to watch them.

Suddenly a fly came in sight. Sybil watched that too, and thought how lumbering and out-of-place it looked. She walked on, after a moment or two, towards that approaching fly—and passed it; then she heard it stop; turned and—to her absolute amazement—saw standing in the roadway the tall slightly stooping figure of Sir Æneas Monteith.

"Well!" said she, moving to shake hands with him; "imagine your being in these parts! What a very funny thing!"

Sir Æneas held her hand lightly.

"Just drive slowly on," he called to the fly-man; "I will overtake you."

Then he looked into Sybil's smiling face. The grey country clothes, the soft blue hat, how they became her to be sure! She was indeed a desirable wife. These thoughts rapidly filled his mind as he answered her remark.

"I don't think it such a very funny thing; I came to see you," he said.

"Me!" The astonishment was genuine enough. "How very nice of you."

She looked greatly puzzled.

"Yes, you!" He went straight to the point. "I can't keep away from you, Miss Sybil—I'm in love with you."

"With me!"

"Yes, with you."

He still held that hand in its gauntlet glove, and the clasp had tightened. He drew her the least trifle nearer; and looking at him she saw that his eyes had altered, and were soft and kind and larger.

"Perhaps to you I seem an old man. I am sixty-three—that is not old really. As men count age, I am not old; but I am lonely. Would you marry me?"

Nothing could have been better. That "but I am lonely" rent Sybil's impressionable heart. . . . Her face flushed crimson, and her grey eyes filled with tears.

"I just can't bear you to be lonely, Sir Æneas dear," she said in a moment, "only—but—I mean—I never marry anyone."

He looked at her again. She was delicious in her confusion, her inconsequent speech, her obvious desire not to hurt.

"I have had a sad life, but if you would marry me the rest of it will be happy, I know."

Again it was effective. Sir Æneas was being wonderfully clever.

Sybil took her hand from his, and turned right away. She looked again towards the fleecy, swiftly driven little clouds, and thoughts —fleecy too, and swiftly driven—chased one another through her mind.

Sir Æneas was not the first man who had wished to marry her; but the other two had been comparatively easy to refuse. Both were young and prosperous; but neither was her Fairy Prince; nor was Sir Æneas the Fairy Prince. But he was sad and lonely, and wanted this. What did it matter about dreams? What on earth did anything matter compared with making someone happy?

Still she gazed at the clouds—ephemeral, but doubtless serving some purpose—and surely it were better to serve some purpose. She turned her grave eyes back to Sir Æneas's face, and the tension and anxiety she saw

written upon it swept vacillation from her mind and hurled her to decision at lightning speed.

"I will marry you gladly. Yes," said she, holding out both her hands; "you shall *not* be lonely. We shall be very happy together, I am quite sure."

She spoke with great decision for—even at that moment of self-sacrifice and exaltation—Sybil, in her heart of hearts, was *not* quite sure. . . . But she did not intend to allow the inner voice, which whispered doubt, to assert itself.

"I thank you," Sir Æneas said. He hesitated for an instant, and then he added: "My heart's desire."

He was most exceedingly solemn. He raised his hat and bent over her. And there, on the Sussex Downs, with no one to see but the white bull-dog (for the fly and its driver had vanished into a hollow), Sir Æneas Monteith kissed a woman, for the first time for thirty years!

CHAPTER V

THERE were arguments and discussion, there was very great unpleasantness in the household in Lowndes Square, so strongly averse were Lord and Lady Colquhoun to the step their niece was taking. Her attitude about it all amazed them too. She said that she could not possibly go back on her word—nothing would induce her to do that, and she was her own mistress. But she never said, nor even attempted to imply, that she was moved by any strong feeling for the man she insisted upon marrying. They entirely misconstrued her action, and formed an opinion of her which estranged them.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid unnecessary talk or scandal, Lord Colquhoun gave Sybil away. The wedding took place on the 1st of June, and actually in St. George's, Hanover Square, by the bridegroom's especial wish.

On her wedding-day Sybil, for the first time, saw—or, indeed, ever heard of, her husband's young kinsman—the other Æneas Monteith. It was startling somehow, even then, when his mother, Lady Monteith—the kind and gracious lady whose acquaintance she had just made—called up a very tall, grave-faced, and fair young man, whose eyes struck Sybil as being bluer than any she had ever seen in her life.

"This is Æneas," Lady Monteith had said.

Often afterwards Sybil thought of the introduction, and the words—"This is Æneas." For this was the real Æneas; the Æneas who was to count.

What he said—what she said—she never remembered. That it was lucky to have a fine day for the wedding, or something of equal importance probably.

Her husband approached and carried her off; monopolized her; his one idea was to end the talking and the reception—the sharing of Sybil; and to get her away all to himself. His jealousy of his possessions in land and wealth was as nothing to the jealousy, which sprung up at once within him, in regard to his wife. And on her wedding-day it made her

laugh with pleasure—she thought it sweet in him to think her so precious—"my very words so precious that nobody else must listen to them!" She tucked an arm through his, and gave it a little squeeze yet—when he turned his face to hers, in response to her movement—she ceased to laugh, and her lips parted with a little gasp of astonishment; so strange and furtively jealous was his expression.

He took her overland to Marseilles (stopping three days in Paris on the way), and thence in his yacht to Greece. And the whole time she lived through a nightmare. She who had thought that it all didn't matter—that marriage was nothing very much—she, the sapient little consoler of mankind, found herself to be the most ignorant, and most helpless of persons.

They returned to Scotland nearly three months later, and then Sybil saw Mount Flotten and its magnificence; the wonderful picture-galleries, the endless treasures it held. She had known Sir Æneas Monteith to be rich, but money—since she had never felt the want of it—was not a matter which interested her in the least; for the rest she had imagined him to be an ordinary country gentleman, and had

never for a moment dreamed of such a place as Flotten; a palace for a King.

She stood bewildered in the vast marble hall—bewildered because, in a flash, she grasped the reason of the attitude her uncle and aunt had adopted towards her. They, of course, had realized what Sir Æneas represented; equally of course, they believed that she had realized it too. Sybil recollected how her father used to say that it was possible to have *too* little curiosity. Why had it never occurred to her to ask questions about her future home?—to ask to see photographs of it. Certainly the time of her engagement had been very short—there had been clothes and things to get in a hurry—a great deal to do; nevertheless, the fact was that it had not occurred to her to ask about these things until—whilst they were abroad—she had begged Sir Æneas to tell her about Flotten. "I can't describe it," he had answered; "you must wait and see."

And now she saw—saw plainly—Flotten, and a number of other things beside!

"I cannot believe it is the man you care for, Sybil," Lady Colquhoun had declared.

"Why do you suppose I marry him, then?" Sybil had said with a laugh; and the unconvincing lightness of tone she adopted at that time—because she had got out of touch with her relatives.

She recollected the disdainful shrug and look with which Lady Colquhoun had turned away; and the words "there are advantages," which Sybil had misconstrued into "there are advantages in being married."

Later—in that same day of her arrival, and comprehension—Sir Æneas showed her the picture gallery, and a gallery of china, worth a fortune in itself. He whispered to her; but his whisper was eager and penetrating:

"You see—you see, Sybil, I want a son of my own to succeed to all this. . . . I think you must understand better now what I said to you—why I said it."

She shrank back. Her husband seemed obsessed by this one desire, that a son should be born. He spoke of it till the very words became unbearable; and when he spoke so, she saw upon his face the look she had first seen in the hall at Lowndes Square—an indescribable look of furtive jealousy—a hideous look.

She saw it now—that was why she shrank away; and because she was overwrought she spoke.

"Don't look so at me. Oh! what can there be in you that makes it possible to look like that?"

He was much surprised.

"Sit down, sit down, my dear," he said. "I have shown you too much, and you are tired."

Sybil swept the air with her hands, in petulant impatience.

"I wish we could live somewhere else!" she burst forth. "I never could like this immense, unhomey place. Oh, isn't it disgusting of me!" she added—instantly repenting of the outburst—for perhaps he was very fond of Flotten; and, though in some vague way repelled, and driven more and more into herself, she still clung to her original resolve of bringing warmth, affection, and kindliness into the life of this strange lonely man.

He responded with alacrity. She did not appear to have hurt him in the least. They would go wherever she liked, and move until they hit on a place she cared to live in. How

would she like to try Droon first? Droon was in the Western Highlands—this was a water-colour sketch of the Castle.

Sybil fell in love with it at once.

"But do you like this place?" she questioned.

"Do not think of me," Sir Æneas urged. "Say precisely what you wish—whatever you may wish will please me."

From the first Sybil loved Droon. It, too, was a fine place, a large and luxurious house; but it was a *home*, and beautifully situated, standing upon a rugged, square-shaped promontory, and originally a fortified castle. During the last hundred years or so bits had been added to it by various Monteiths, but always with symmetry, and an eye to architectural effect.

High on the rocks it stood, and ramparts surrounded it. From the flagged paths of the rampart gardens one could, to the west, overlook the Atlantic; and south and east—seen from the majority of the windows of the house—lay a quiet bay, outlined with hills which looked mountainous, by reason of their rising sheer from the sea.

"Oh, the soft, heavenly air! the delicious-

ness of this place?" Sybil exclaimed, when she arrived there.

"You like it? You think it healthy?" Sir Æneas laid stress on that "healthy."

"I am sure," Sybil answered him gravely, "that it must be very healthy, and just the place for sons!"

Then the ludicrousness of the whole thing struck her, and she laughed aloud.

"Oh, Æneas!" she said.

CHAPTER VI

So they were installed—Sir Æneas and Lady Monteith—and the futility of the task which she had set herself to accomplish, began daily to be borne in upon Sybil's mind.

She really added no brightness to her husband's life—the pleasure which her *joie de vivre* was said to have given him had either rapidly worn itself out, or had in truth never existed. Her only value in his eyes—his only interest in her now—appeared to be centred in the fact that it was she who would be the mother of his son. On that account she was treasured.

From a social point of view life at Castle Droon was dull. There were scarcely any neighbours, and they at such very long distances that visits were few and far between. Also, Sir Æneas had never entertained in his country-houses; so, since they

had arrived at Droon, nobody had been to stay with the exception of his agent, Mr. Alexander Forbes, who frequently appeared.

In Sybil's life there had always been much coming and going, and she missed it. There seemed no reason why they should not have at least a few guests. She decided that her friend from the Sussex Rectory, who was a dear girl and would enjoy the change, would be a good person to begin with.

"Do you recollect Kitty Norton? and should you mind if I asked her to come and stay with me here?" she said one afternoon.

"Mind! Why should I mind? By all means ask the young lady here. I do trust you have not been fretting over this," he added anxiously, "hesitating to consult me. I do not wish you to worry over anything whatsoever."

Sybil stared. Involuntarily she said "tt," and very nearly added that this ridiculous anxiety was on her mind, on her nerves; but she restrained herself and answered instead, rather wearily, that the plan had occurred to her about an hour ago.

Kitty came, but it was not a great success.

She enjoyed herself by day, but so much detested the evenings that the enjoyment was outweighed. Dinner at Droon was a ceremony, and a pompous one at that. Even when Sir Æneas and his wife were alone, Sybil was expected to appear *en grande tenue*, and wear jewels. He had solemnly requested her to do that; but she, when inviting her friend, had entirely forgotten this question of clothes. She was obliged to apologize to Æneas for Kitty in her simple little muslin frock, but she felt that it was to the other the apologies were due—for her own absurd magnificence and tiaras; and for the host's silences, varied by monopolizing disertations on the ancient Greeks, Scythians, and Spartans, about whom Kitty knew little, and cared less. Sybil felt that, this visit over, she would prefer not to risk any other girl-friends. Fräulein Brentmann, who was to come to them for Christmas, might be quite a success. She was oblivious to clothes, and knew a good deal about the Greeks.

In spite of the sense of social ostracism which crept over her sometimes, and the disappointment she could not but feel as to the

small success of her mission in life, yet there was a great deal left to enjoy, especially while the fine autumn weather lasted. Out in the bay lay the steam-yacht, *The White Lady*, though she was not much in request. Sybil did not care for long cruises; she liked better a launch or rowing-boat to take her round to some sheltered cranny, where—letting the men land and leave her—she could be moored, and lie and read and think, and watch the sea-birds who haunted the high rocks by hundreds.

She was in such a place one day, and although it was the end of October it was a day of brilliant sunshine. The bottom of the boat was piled with cushions, and she lay, supremely comfortable, with Herbert Spencer's "First Principles" propped in front of her. She had decided to concentrate her reading—confine it, for a time at least, to some particular line; and she told herself, not without a smile, that philosophy would probably be as useful as anything else.

She lay there reading, when a slight sound, not made by fish or seagull, caused her to look up. There, some fifteen feet above her, on an edge of rock, stood an impressive, unfamiliar

figure — the figure of a clergyman. She observed his orthodox costume — the gold chain with a cross attached to it; his head— a wonderful head—hatless, covered by a mass of silky white hair.

He stood gazing out to sea, and obviously so far had not noticed her. He had not as yet looked down into the cranny; but in a moment he did so, and she smiled as she saw his hand—such a slender, nervous hand!—rise involuntarily to his head to raise the hat which was not there.

She bowed, and found herself saying that it was a glorious day. Why she made that inane remark she did not know, and obviously it had not reached him, for this time his hand went to his ear. Who, she wondered, could he possibly be? It seemed, however, quite natural that he should come down from his rock right into her cranny—and stand by the stern of the boat.

"Forgive me," he said, "the sea against those rocks prevented my hearing. I am a trifle deaf. What did you say to me?"

"I'm quite ashamed to have brought you down here. I really only said that it is a glorious

day—a foolish remark—but the fact is, it is so extremely unusual to see anyone in these parts I felt I must say something." She had risen from amongst the cushions, and was now sitting in the bows.

"I fear I have been an interruption." He glanced at the books and smiled.

"Not in the least; I'm not reading against time." Who could he be? Where could he come from? Perhaps the question showed itself in her eyes; in any case he answered it.

"My name," he said, "is John Morrison. I have succeeded in getting a little house near the village of Droon, rented from the laird, Sir Æneas Monteith. I arrived last night, and, as you see, am already exploring.

Sybil was immensely interested.

"I recollect hearing that Burnside had been let," she said. "Is it you who have taken Burnside?"

"Yes, that is it."

"Then we shall really have a neighbour! If you knew anything of Droon, you would realize that that is a most remarkable event. Please let me introduce myself: I am Lady Monteith

He bowed.

"I do know something of Droon," he said, "for my father was minister there, and my childhood was spent at the Manse. That rock" —he pointed to it—"was a great haunt of mine; such a place for sea-birds eggs!" A far-off look of reminiscent amusement came over his face. "Ah yes, I do know something of Droon! Since those days I've been over most of the world; but one longs to finish where one began—to complete the circle. It is very delightful to get back to Droon! However, I really must not interrupt you further; it has been too bad of me already, I'm afraid."

Sybil stood up and held out her hand, leaning forward a little; smiling; a trifle unsteady as the boat swayed in the lap of the small waves.

"I'm so pleased to have made your acquaintance, and hope we may meet again soon. I shall tell my husband of your arrival. Meantime, good-bye."

Thus informally did this acquaintance with the Reverend John Morrison begin — an acquaintance destined to influence the future.

Mr. Morrison did not belie his appearance; he was indeed, a remarkable man. From Aberdeen College, where he went as a lad, he won a scholarship which took him to Cambridge, and it soon became evident that a brilliant career lay before him. Great things were expected of Morrison. But suddenly—quite suddenly—to the amazement of all, and to the bitter disappointment of a few, he cast aside his chances (so they said), threw himself heart and soul into the advance guard of the English High Church movement, and eventually took Holy Orders. Difficulties and disappointments surrounded him on all sides: threats and Calvinistic condemnation reached him through the post from the Manse at Droon. And it had been sorely hard so to hurt and grieve his old parents. But he was "called": how could he swerve? For him the voice of God was the supreme voice; the desire to obey that voice the supreme desire. From that time forward, if not always on precisely the same lines, yet always with unabating zeal, his energies and abilities were devoted to the Great Service. There lay intellect behind that massive brow; strength

in the firm lines of his jaw and chin; but, predominating, was the peculiar, half-ascetic, half-etherealized appearance—which stamps those who serve as he served; and his dark eyes shone with the brightness of a visionary and a zealot.

CHAPTER VII

SIR ÆNEAS took Sybil's news of Mr. Morrison's arrival in a most singular manner. He narrowed his eyes, and looked suspiciously at her.

"You say you met this man by Fionagh's Crag?"

"I never said I met the man by Fionagh's Crag." Sybil laughed, half mocking his tone, which was ridiculous. "I said, my dear, that the benevolent and interesting gentleman appeared upon the rock above my head *most* unexpectedly."

"I don't intend to have anything to do with him," snapped her husband. She was amazed.

"Why? He is a charming and striking personality. What is there against him, Æneas?"

"Nothing against him. I don't intend to know him, that is all." There was a tone of finality in his voice, and it roused in Sybil

a spirit of rebellion and annoyance, such as she rarely felt.

"*I* intend to know him," she said; "I am convinced he is particularly well worth knowing. I shall write and ask him to come to see *me*, then."

"You will do——" Sir Æneas began angrily; he even raised his voice a trifle—"you will do nothing of the kind," he was going to say; but the sight of Sybil's flushed face and shining eyes suddenly filled him with anxiety, and he ended lamely—"as you like."

She noted the change, and knew the cause of it; it angered her still more.

"Until my son is born," she blazed out. "I begin to hate the sound of that; I feel like one of the handmaidens one reads about in the Old Testament. They certainly ought to be here now, to do this kind of business."

"My dear!" He was greatly surprised—he was shocked.

"Yes, your dear! It is I, Sybil, who say so. This is a professional person's job, not one for—for me." She had stood up; now she sat down again. The storm was waning.

"You see, Æneas," she added rather wearily,

"a man scores. When I married I thought I knew all kinds of things, but was most profoundly ignorant; I wonder how many girls that happens to! I hope"—she laid her hands on the arm of the chair, and, leaning slightly forward, looked very straight at him—"I *do* hope, for your sake, that a son will be born—not a girl—for I tell you plainly that I never could go through all this again."

"You are needlessly exciting yourself, Sybil," he said. "What were we discussing? Ah yes! Mr. Morrison; you wished him asked here. I will write this moment and ask him to dinner."

He sat down at once at a writing-table and wrote the note.

It was October, and although the days were warm the evenings were chilly, and a fire burned in the grate. It flickered and gleamed, and made the highly polished floor shine in its light. Sybil, seated in her low chair, leaned back and looked down and across that room (known as the small drawing-room) surveyed it, and its furniture, her husband, and herself—from the outside, as it were; as though she had nothing at all to do with it.

It was a reposeful room—no little things about: none of the knick-knacks which filled her boudoir: but some splendid vases—*mille fleurs* and *la famille verte*—a fine picture or two and a couple of magnificent Venetian mirrors provided ample feast for the eye; and the brocaded curtains—a trifle faded—and soft rose-coloured brocade of the furniture, were all harmonious. Harmonious, too, the tea-table, and the Chinese eggshell tea-service, so delicately coloured; harmonious too, somehow, that long figure of Sir Æneas there at the writing-table; in the velveteen coat of a very dark grey-blue, which he generally wore at this time of day. She watched him. How thin his hands were to be sure! How delicate and old he looked! Surely he was stooping more than usual? A pang of remorse shot through her—remorse and a great longing to mend things. She rose and moved towards him; he sealed the letter at the same moment, and turned. His face looked grey, drawn, and tired—or was all this the effect of the shaded lamplight?

"I have done as you wished," he said.

"I hope I have not teased you into it; but

would it not be very unneighbourly that you should ignore your tenant? Now, don't you honestly think that it would?"

She said this with a caress in her voice; went to him and laid her hands upon his shoulders—half shyly, for they seemed such strangers nowadays; much greater strangers than before their marriage.

"All the same, I'm afraid I was rude and impatient, Æneas," she added. "I'm sorry for that."

"My dear, nothing at all," he said. "Don't be sorry."

"Come and sit down and tell me things; there is a nice chair for you," she said, and wheeled one up to the fire, sitting herself upon a large square stool near by. "You are looking tired. What have you done all day?"

He made no immediate reply, and in a second she repeated the question:

"Have you had a busy day? What have you been doing?" and she looked towards him, awaiting his reply.

What she saw startled her. "What is it?" she asked quickly; for surely he was pressing

his hand against his side. "Does your side hurt you?"

Sybil rose, anxiously watching him, bending a little towards him; he narrowed his eyes, and met hers. There was a moment of tense silence.

"My side! How you fly to conclusions, Sybil, to be sure! I was feeling for my cigarette-case."

He produced the case and opened it.

"If you have no objection?" he said.

"You certainly looked as though you were in pain," Sybil answered gravely.

CHAPTER VIII

MONTHS passed—alienating months. Stirred by vague undefined uneasiness in respect of her husband's health, Sybil became more and more earnest and anxious in her endeavour to please him, whilst he, apparently, was more and more determined to stand aloof, and alone; shrank further into his shell, and lived chiefly in his own rooms.

The other Æneas had paid a short visit to the Castle during the Christmas rising of the Courts. His coming brought a breeze of health and strength from the outside world.

To him Sybil hinted at her anxiety.

"How does it strike you that Æneas is?"

"He doesn't look very grand—but then he never does."

"I wish he were stronger," she said, "and that he would let one take more care of him . . . it is so difficult to do anything for him."

They were out of doors, walking along beside the burn, on a straggling path, where rowan-trees and Scotch firs kept things bright in spite of the winter. The path was narrow, and they walked in single file. When Sybil sighed, Æneas glanced at her over his shoulder. He strode on in silence for a moment or so, then suddenly stopped: turned round, and did not glance, but looked steadily; as though taking stock of her from top to toe; looked earnestly, and Sybil, as she met his eyes, felt her pulse stirred. His was a magnetic personality.

She spoke, in order to break the spell and cover her inward confusion.

"Shall you know me again?" she asked, with a little laugh.

He, too, laughed. "I'm sorry; I was considering you. My mother tells me I stare at people."

"Well, walk on! Your mother is certainly right."

"The path widens round the next corner," he said, and walked on; but the instant they came to the wider path he waited to join her. "I was wondering whether I dared venture to

say something to you, which I know is an impertinence; but which I shall say with the best intentions and motives. I am sure you would at least believe that."

It was Sybil's turn to stare and consider; but that took a mere moment; her decision was made at her usual lightning speed.

"Say what you choose, Æneas; I have every confidence in you."

"Well." He hesitated for a second (and in that second she again realized the magnetism of this tall strong figure, and the truth of her statement that she had every confidence in him). "There is a tenant at Burnside now, I hear."

"Yes; Mr. John Morrison."

Again the grave blue eyes were full upon her face.

"My cousin dislikes your acquaintance with him," he said.

Sybil flushed scarlet; not with confusion, but with wrath. What would Sir Æneas have said had he witnessed such an upsetting of her equanimity? She brought her walking-stick on to the ground with force.

"Do you really mean to tell me that he

has complained to you of my friendship with Mr. Morrison? Oh, it is monstrous! . . . If he objected to it, why not say so to me himself? Did he depute you to tell me that?"

It was rather startling, not quite what Æneas had bargained for; but he could not help thinking that anger made Sybil look glorious—and her grey eyes were streaked with black, like a cat's eyes.

"I'm extremely sorry," he said, "but, all the same, the matter is serious, I'm afraid, and if you could see your way—— well, you think it over, Sybil," he added, more lightly; "I'm sure you're a good sort."

The informal words produced their effect, acting as a cold douche on her excited nerves. They walked on in silence.

"Do you know anything about Mr. Morrison?" she asked.

"Nothing whatsoever."

"He is a kind of saint, I think," she said quietly. "He lives very near to God. I shall be sorry if I am not to know him; for it is a great privilege—a great help. Life here is not altogether easy, you know."

Again Æneas looked at her. "Poor girl,"

he said mentally. "I'm sure it can't be," he said aloud. "All I want to suggest to you is not to complicate it by going against the wishes of mine host. He didn't talk much to me, but he said enough; in some way I feel certain this is on his nerves; and he keeps things to himself, and lets them smoulder. Then shadows grow to be realities, you know; —at least, don't you think so? Forgive me if I've been officious, and you just think it over."

"All right, I'll think it over." Æneas had been disarming and tentative. She was not offended with him, but she gave a laugh with annoyance in it, and those direct blue eyes were turned on her once more. She met them, checked her laugh, and wondered to herself at feeling something—something indefinable—which she had never felt before.

Æneas took this somewhat extraordinary step owing to a conversation of the previous night, when his kinsman had gone to the point in a manner that almost defied criticism. Any feelings the younger man might have had in regard to the succession were ignored: and ignored with a completeness which had

its gratifying aspect—so entirely did it reckon on his unselfish altruism.

"You know," Sir Æneas said, "I am greatly hoping before I die to see a son born to me, so that the Monteith property shall descend in direct succession, as it has done for generations."

"I'm sure I hope you may," young Æneas answered. "You will, too," he added cheerily.

"I hope I may; but about human life, human events, there is always uncertainty. I must provide for contingencies."

He keenly watched the effect of his words, but no unseemly gleams of hope appeared on the younger man's face. "I say I must provide for contingencies. I have confidence in you, Æneas: you are straightforward, I believe. . . ."

There was a pause; it was a tiresome situation.

"I hope so," Æneas said at last.

"In the event of my death, I should wish to appoint trustees. You will be willing, I hope, to act in that capacity."

"Certainly; I would do all in my power to carry out your wishes and directions."

"Thank you," he said; "I am much obliged. I should not ask you to act alone; the responsibility is heavy. . . . Sibyl is—well, Sibyl is no more reliable than her sex implies."

The younger man had sufficient tact to make no comment.

Sir Æneas paced up and down the room with quick, nervous steps. One hand was placed on his left hip; he stooped very much, and his restless eyes travelled from right to left, swiftly glancing in all directions. Presently he stopped, and began to move the papers on his writing-table, placing them aimlessly together. It was obvious that what he was about to say lay near his heart. . . . It came at last.

"It is painful to confess it, but I cannot entirely trust my wife. She forms friendships, puts herself under influences, of which I strongly disapprove. This clergyman . . ." Again his eyes slowly swept the room. "This clergyman," he repeated, and broke off.

"What clergyman?" asked the other at last. He seemed to be expected to ask it.

"This Mr. Morrison, to whom, in an evil

moment, I let Burnside. She insists upon making an intimate friend of him."

"Have you told her you object?"

"I hinted at it, but she became excited; in her condition it is a matter of the utmost importance that she should remain calm. She must go her way, but I fear she will shatter any reliance I ever placed in her. Women, Æneas, women; be warned—*bien fol qui s'y fie.* I shall see how she acts; what further she does. It may influence the future very considerably."

He sat down.

"Thank you," he added more pleasantly; "I am much obliged to you for accepting the trusteeship."

The interview was at an end. Æneas was dismissed. He strolled into the open air, with a feeling of depression and uneasiness upon him, a presentiment of evil days ahead, and a desire to forewarn Sybil.

CHAPTER IX

At last, towards the end of April, the great event took place. And now there it lay!—this wished-for heir to the Monteith estates; the baby! . . . There it lay; a round, red, wrinkled creation possessed of a mass of silky hair and—not a boy after all! When, in answer to her whispered inquiry—repeated more than once—she heard that a little girl had been born, Sybil cried, with a weak sense of disappointment. She had not sufficient strength to feel acutely.

The baby had arranged her advent altogether badly, arriving five weeks before she was expected, in the midst of the first visit Lord and Lady Colquhoun had paid to their niece since her marriage. They had proposed themselves, and that more as a matter of politeness than anything else. Lord Colquhoun had taken a salmon-fishing within a couple of hours

of Droon by rail, and it would, they decided, be *too* unfriendly altogether to ignore Sybil; she was therefore taken *en route* to the salmon, and they came for Easter, which fell early that year. Young Æneas also came for Easter, a long-established custom; and his being there was a relief, and a help in entertaining the others.

When Sybil was taken ill, and the cause of her illness became known, an extraordinary anxiety seemed to envelop the whole household. Robina Frazer—Sybil's lifelong attendant—waited in a fever of nervous excitement outside the door of her mistress's bedroom. She was far too fussing to be admitted, for she swayed hysterically between the lowest depths of dread, and the heights of exaltation. When she heard that all was well—child and mother both alive—she lost her head to such an extent that she hurried off to carry the news to the baby's father. She tapped loudly upon the door of his study; then, realizing the magnitude of her venture, her heart beat faster still. No one ever did such a thing! No one—not even his wife—ventured to go to these rooms, unless specially sent for.

"Come in," said a voice, after an instant of tense silence, during which Robina recognized that she was interrupting a conversation; someone had been speaking when she knocked. She opened the door, and its lintel framed her portly person, in black gown and black silk apron. She dropped a low curtsey.

Sir Æneas Monteith sat by his writing-table—he was leaning forward, his hands pressed upon the table, his face drawn and unusually white. The eyes which he fixed upon Robina glittered as the eyes of an angry animal glitter.

Half-way between the writing-table and the window stood Alexander Forbes, and he was angry too: anger was written all over him; his hands were thrust deep into his pockets, and his face was as flushed as that of Sir Æneas was livid. He stared at Robina, and said sharply: "What is it you want?"

"Begging yóur pardon, sirr," announced Robina, with a fine Scotch burr, "herr ledyship has a dearr wee girrlie; and herr——"

Sir Æneas raised one hand, and pointed to the door. Robina instantly retired.

"Ma guidness!" she murmured to herself,

overawed and most strangely frightened. When, in a measure, she recovered her composure, she determined to find Lady Colquhoun; she was thirsting for sympathy, and hoped to get a little there. She made her way down the long corridors of the Castle—up steps and down steps, over richest and thickest of carpets, and the words of an old Scotch song floated through her mind:

> "I'd tak' my ain lad wi' his staff in his hand,
> Afore I'd tak' Sandy wi' gear and wi' land."

"Ma guidness, puir lassie!" she said again; this time she said it aloud.

Lady Colquhoun was sitting alone in the library, reading a newspaper. She laid the paper down as Robina, approaching, curtsied, and repeated her formula.

"M' ledy, herr ledyship has a dearr wee girrlie, and herr ledyship is doing just fine."

Robina was beaming—personally "a dear wee girlie" was far more to her liking than a boy would have been.

"What a very disappointing piece of information, Robina," said Lady Colquhoun in her most distant manner. "However, I am glad all goes well."

She resumed her reading of the paper. Poor Robina! it was very chilling! She had spent her life in service, but there "are times"—as she confided to the housekeeper—"when the ways of the gentry are hard to understand."

On luncheon being announced, Lady Colquhoun began a solitary meal; Sir Æneas disliked that anyone should wait for him, or for others, at luncheon. Still, it struck her as curious that no one should have managed to be punctual! . . . neither her host nor Mr. Forbes—nor even her husband and Æneas. These latter two had spent the morning fishing a near stream, and, intending to return early, had not taken sandwiches with them.

At half-past two, when coffee was being handed, and she had lighted the cigarette from which she found solace in existence, there was a sound of low voices; a servant opened the dining-room door and Lord Colquhoun entered, Æneas was just behind him. She noticed their boots first — their boots were abnormally dirty.

"Surely you don't propose to lunch in those b——" She looked up; rose alarmed, and moved to them.

"Why, what is it, Willie?" she asked. "How is Sybil? What has happened?"

Lord Colquhoun laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Sir Æneas; my dear," he said—"Sir Æneas Monteith is dead."

CHAPTER X

THE funeral took place at Flotten, for there generations of the Monteiths lay buried. But on the following night the executors under the will had returned to Droon, and were closeted together in the late laird's study. There were three of them—Mr. Forbes, Lord Monteith, and Æneas—and they worked well into the small hours; for it was important to the Judge to put in as much as possible of the business entailed by this executorship, before the following Monday.

"This will, then," Lord Monteith was saying, "was actually drawn up just before his death."

"Yes, that is so," said Mr. Forbes. "Lady Monteith took to her bed on Thursday afternoon, and that night he invaded her boudoir—I don't know why, but he did so. He opened her escritoire and looked through her papers.

In consequence of what he found he made this will."

Lord Monteith looked at the agent; he appeared to be weighing some consideration; finally he spoke. "What did he find?"

"He found her diary—and, in the diary, there are constant references to Mr. Morrison, the tenant at Burnside."

"Phew!" whistled the Judge.

"I felt he was jealous of that man; I tried to warn Sybil," said Æneas.

"A more unjustifiable—I may say outrageous—jealousy, it is impossible to conceive of; and there is nothing whatsoever in the diary beyond the mention of his name. 'I saw Mr. Morrison. I talked to Mr. Morrison about Schopenhauer; he was wonderful.' That was an entry which, for some reason, angered Sir Æneas amazingly. Why must women keep diaries! what tomfoolery it is!"

"After all," the Judge said kindly, "this poor girl is very young. I don't suppose she'll keep diaries in the future."

"I hear from Crofton," Mr. Forbes resumed, "that Sir Æneas had an attack of violent pain that night—heart, of course—

brought on by excitement and anger, no doubt. He recovered in about an hour, and must then have drawn up this will; it was witnessed on Thursday night by Crofton and McPhail. It is perfectly in order. He had just told me the terms of it when Mrs. Frazer came, and announced the birth of a daughter. I had expostulated with Sir Æneas in a manner I have never ventured on before, and I fear the anger my words caused him, and the disappointment as to the sex of this child, combined to bring about the fatal spasm."

The agent stopped, and turned away. When next he spoke his voice was not quite steady.

"I have worked with the laird for thirty years," he explained, "and, in spite of many difficulties, I had a sentiment of affection for him."

There was silence a moment or two, then Æneas spoke—deliberately.

"I liked the old chap, too," he said. "He was awful kind to me always, and—well, he was a pathetic figure!"

"He was that," said Lord Monteith, and Mr. Forbes, after sneezing in aggressive asser-

tion of the sudden fact that he had a cold, blew his nose.

"None the less," the Judge said presently, "this will is a vindictive and embarrassing document, and will cause much anxiety and trouble. It is most unfortunate, in my opinion, that Lady Monteith's advisers and friends did not insist upon a marriage settlement."

By his last will Sir Æneas had provided that, in the event of a son being born, everything should go in trust for him, with the exception of a few bequests, and an annuity of five hundred pounds a year to Lady Monteith. In the event of a daughter being born she was to inherit Droon only. Four thousand a year was provided in trust for her—Alexander Forbes and Æneas being the trustees. Five hundred remained Lady Monteith's jointure. The Flotten estate and the house in London —but no money—were left to Æneas; his father inheriting nothing but the baronetcy and a complimentary legacy as executor. Ten thousand pounds came to Alexander Forbes, and with the exception of some legacies to servants, the whole remainder of the Monteith

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tion of the sudden fact that he had a cold, blew his nose.

"None the less," the Judge said presently, "this will is a vindictive and embarrassing document, and will cause much anxiety and trouble. It is most unfortunate, in my opinion, that Lady Monteith's advisers and friends did not insist upon a marriage settlement."

By his last will Sir Æneas had provided that, in the event of a son being born, everything should go in trust for him, with the exception of a few bequests, and an annuity of five hundred pounds a year to Lady Monteith. In the event of a daughter being born she was to inherit Droon only. Four thousand a year was provided in trust for her—Alexander Forbes and Æneas being the trustees. Five hundred remained Lady Monteith's jointure. The Flotten estate and the house in London —but no money—were left to Æneas; his father inheriting nothing but the baronetcy and a complimentary legacy as executor. Ten thousand pounds came to Alexander Forbes, and with the exception of some legacies to servants, the whole remainder of the Monteith

But his wife was quite determined.

"I really cannot," she said. "To-day I was afraid she would guess something from my manner. The worry of these interviews is making me quite ill."

The most worrying interview had been this last, for Sybil had said: "Her father seems to have no curiosity to see baby," and that remark had made Lady Colquhoun nervous. She was not a good dissembler, but she tried.

"I don't think men generally have—they—well—you know—I think they generally dislike babies so young as all that." She gave a jerky little laugh.

"I'm afraid they dislike *girl* babies," Sybil answered. "I wish I could have helped it."

She closed her eyes, for which Lady Colquhoun was thankful, as she felt herself looking self-conscious.

This was the only occasion on which Sybil had alluded to her husband's absence, but she constantly thought of it, although she tried not to, and not to think of the future either, which some instinct seemed to tell her held trouble in store.

So the days passed, till at last she was up

and able to go into her boudoir—the little blue boudoir, which Sir Æneas had raided—the pretty little boudoir, with its broad balcony, where, on a deck-chair, she lay looking out upon the quiet bay, and the greys and purples of the distant hills.

It had been decided that she ought now to be told of what had happened.

Fräulein Brentmann had been sent for when the Colquhouns were leaving, and so was at the Castle. She and Mr. Forbes held prolonged consultations as to who should break this news. Mr. Forbes would not; could not, he said. Fräulein Brentmann's statements were always alarmingly abrupt, so she was not suitable. Sybil had asked to see Mr. Morrison. No one, in the Fräulein's view, could be better than Mr. Morrison, but the agent objected to him. There was the doctor, but Sybil disliked him; so, finally, it was decided to await Æneas's return. Business had called him to London, but he was obliged to return, and on his shoulders the responsibility was ultimately placed.

Sybil felt very glad to see him, for she now thought of little else than Sir Æneas's absence

—a matter as to which, at last, she hoped that she might get help. He had scarcely seated himself than she began to talk, answering his questions hurriedly.

"Oh yes, I'm all right; but it worries me so terribly that Æneas should not come near me—I think that keeps me back. I can't speak to people about it, but I *do* want you to help me; he is very fond of you. Will you try to persuade him to come to see me? Tell him I miss him very much. It's true. I'm always longing Æneas should believe that those things are true. And I want him to believe, too, that I *wish* the baby had not been a girl. But above all, I want to see him."

The young man's eyes met hers, and the distress in them made her apprehensive.

"Nothing has gone wrong?" she asked, moving uneasily.

"Yes," he said. "Sybil, I grieve to tell you things have gone wrong."

"Oh!" she half sighed, half groaned. "It has been such a bitter disappointment—it has made him ill."

"He has been ill; you must not feel that

was the cause though. You know he was never a strong man."

Sybil narrowed her grey eyes very slightly, and fixed them upon Æneas; then, as though with an instinct of worse to come and a desire for protection, she held out her hand. He took it, and placed it between both his own.

"And—is he better now?" she asked.

Æneas gripped the hand more tightly, and gazed at her. It was so hard to say actual words; also, as it proved, not necessary.

Sybil drew back and away from him, grasping the arms of her chair, and a flood of crimson colour rushed over her face.

"When?" she whispered.

"Three weeks ago last Friday."

"The day baby was born!" "Will you —you won't mind leaving me alone?" Her lips trembled; she motioned with her hand towards the door, and as he closed it behind him he heard a low moan and a sob.

CHAPTER XI

It seemed that Fate had taken young Æneas Monteith early by the hand, with the intention of leading him through grim places. Curious indeed it is how that gaunt Lady attaches herself to certain persons, weaving into their lives intricate strains of apparently alien substance, involving them in a maze of destiny.

After his cousin's death, it became obvious that Æneas must make his own way in the world. He would, he concluded, be obliged to abandon the idea of going into political life; and he must set himself with all his might to make a career, and if possible a fortune, at the Bar. Hard enough to do; but he had health, he had ability, was no shirker of work, and, further, possessed of a well-known name.

The law had always attracted him, and he

had done well; very well indeed so far. Had he only not been handicapped, not hounded by this necessity of making money, he would have faced the life before him without any regret for the loss of the Monteith fortunes; for Æneas was singularly unworldly, unambitious of possession, but keen as to the success of that which he set himself to accomplish, and he liked to have a goal. Further, he was by nature sanguine, and not prone to regret the inevitable.

That "property has its duties as well as its rights" is the oft-quoted dictum of a famous Irish Secretary; but, in this case, it seemed that Æneas had been saddled with all the duties and none of the rights; all the anxieties of property and no means of enjoying it. Flotten was a terrible white elephant, for it was quite impossible, as Mr. Forbes had said, to keep such a place going on the rental of the estate. What, too, was to be done about Droon? about Sybil and her affairs, and his trusteeship? It was a hideous worry. Young, strong, and hopeful as Æneas might be, he began to feel the wear and strain peculiar to troubles over money.

Then Fate seized her opportunity. "Will you walk into my parlour?" she hummed.

Lord Monteith received a letter from an acquaintance to whom the difficulties with regard to the Flotten estate were more or less known. The letter came from New York. It was brief but very much to the point.

In an hotel this acquaintance—a Mr. Birch—had met and talked to one, James S. Quintin, who had made a colossal fortune in trade, and wished to rent a placé in Yorkshire or in Scotland, where he would be able to entertain shooting and other parties, in princely style. Mr. Birch had suggested and described Flotten, and the American was inclined to think it likely to suit him; but business matters made it impossible for him to go to Europe at the moment, and he wanted the place that summer. Could it be arranged for him to interview someone personally, hear details fully, and see photographs? If convinced that Mount Flotten was what he wanted, he would take it from July for three years, with the option of continuing his tenancy.

Would it be possible, wrote Mr. Birch—if the idea of this let appealed to them—that

Æneas or an agent should come over? He had made inquiries about Mr. Quintin, and heard that his fortune was in truth colossal; he did not seem a bad fellow either. Mr. Birch did not anticipate their finding any difficulty or unpleasantness in dealing with him.

The Judge and Alexander Forbes welcomed the letter. It was, in fact, the greatest relief. But from Æneas, in spite of the load of anxiety which would be lifted off his shoulders, came unexpected opposition.

Worry had tried his temper, and the letting of Flotten, now that it loomed imminent, was hugely distasteful to his pride. Flotten contained the treasures of generation after generation of the Monteiths. Flotten had been in their possession for five hundred years. Were they now going to let it? And if they were forced to let it, why to an American? "Damn it! Surely the place could be kept in the country."

This came at the end of a long and heated argument.

"Bless my soul!" cried the agent, "you're powerless, sir. Mr. Birch has hit the only kind of man who can afford to take a place

like Flotten; it would be the very height of folly to reject the chance."

"Oh, well, do as you like; don't consult me; get on with it; I give you *carte blanche*," said Æneas at last.

He shook hands with old Forbes, but walked off very black; out of the house, through Randolph Crescent with long strides, over the Dean Bridge, past Fetis, past Dalmeny, on to Hopetoun.

By that time the inevitable was establishing itself rather more comfortably, and returning in time for dinner, outwardly at least, he was himself once more. His mother was particularly sweet and understanding. All the evening he held skeins of wool for her to wind, and chaffed her about the many worsted garments of her manufacture handed over for "the poor" to wear.

"'Poor indeed,'" said Æneas. "My word, I should hate to wear a petticoat like that, shouldn't you, father? Dark grey with a red rim—veritable *lainerie d'honnête femme*."

"I will *not* smile, Æneas," said Lady Monteith; and did it.

No reference was made to the afternoon's

discussion or arrangements, until, as they were parting for the night, the Judge laid his hand on his son's shoulder, and said:

"Forbes sails next week, my lad."

But here again Fate intervened—Forbes did not sail next week. The next week Forbes—one of the few occasions of his life—was ill; threatened with congestion of the lungs: so Æneas sailed in his stead.

With him he took letters of introduction to his father's acquaintance, Mr. Birch, and he and that gentleman dined at a club to meet Mr. Quintin, who—square-shouldered, keen-eyed, and downright—gave a strong impression of force. Æneas felt somewhat ashamed of the prejudice he had entertained against him; none the less the business part of their interview with regard to Flotten was galling. Mr. Quintin asked many searching questions. Then in silence he looked at the photographs taken for his benefit, and in silence replaced them in their packet, folded the paper and tied the string. After that he stood up, facing Æneas.

"Why, it's the very place! I'll lease it, certainly," he said, "from July in this year.

There only remains that we should sign the contract." He was extremely kind and friendly.

The next day he proposed returning to his villa at Murray Bay on the St. Lawrence, near by Quebec, and pressed Æneas to accompany him, get a glimpse of Canada, and make the acquaintance of his wife and daughter. He strongly pressed this invitation. Æneas had already been in Canada. He knew that Murray Bay and its villas did not greatly interest him; he did not suppose that Mrs. and Miss Quintin would interest him greatly either, but it seemed more civil to accept; so he went.

Through all the years of his life he never forgot the appearance of Lois Quintin as he first saw her, silhouetted between the blue of sky and water. She was standing at the far end of the verandah of the villa, shading her eyes from the sun, and gazing on the river, here like a sea—so great its width. Her profile was towards him—amazingly perfect, still and statuesque.

"I can't think where my wife can be—but thats' my daughter," said Mr. Quintin. Then,

as though conscious of the effectiveness of her pose, he paused a moment or two before he raised his voice and called to her:

"Lois, will you come here, and be introduced to Mr. Æneas Monteith?

Mr. Quintin laid the accent wrongly on the first syllable of Æneas.

Very slowly Lois dropped her hand to her side. She made no reply, did not even glance in their direction, but with her head slightly bent, and both arms hanging listlessly, she began to walk towards them.

"Should we not save Miss Quintin trouble by going to her?" Æneas suggested, and moved forward.

The verandah was a long one, glowing with colour from great pots of flowering shrubs, green foliage, Oriental mats, and the gay covered cushions of the many wicker chairs and couches; but Æneas's eyes were on the approaching figure, the lines of which a white clinging dress allowed to be clearly, almost too clearly, seen.

Lois was tall and very slight; her face seemed as white as the dress, and her hair—blackest of black—fell in rippling waves to

each side of her face, and was coiled heavily round her head.

An extraordinary sensation of uneasiness, for which he could in no wise account, gripped Æneas as the figure came nearer. He noted every detail—the small mouth, but somewhat full and remarkably red lips; the clearly marked eyebrows, the heavy eyelids, and long lashes. He could not see the eyes; she never looked from the ground until her father spoke.

"My daughter Lois," he said; "for that matter, my only daughter—my only child."

Then Lois looked up, and Æneas saw her eyes. She fixed them, in fact, full upon him with so direct, and yet somehow so pathetic a stare, that it was he who, after a moment, averted his gaze; the singular sensation of uneasiness intensified. Those large, brown, animal-like eyes haunted him, and Lois held him, from that moment, in a kind of spell, which—if analyzed—would have resolved itself into a senseless longing. But Æneas was not inclined to analysis—indeed, under such influences few people are.

A day's acquaintance showed him that Lois Quintin was not brilliant; she had practically

no conversation. She was neither tender, gracious, nor sympathetic—qualities he so loved in his mother; yet she made to some part of his being an irresistible appeal, and undeniably she possessed physical beauty of a strange and arresting type. She had an air of breeding, too, which came, no doubt, on the mother's side; for Mrs. Quintin, a quiet, sad-looking lady, who hailed from Virginia, had very much of that air herself.

Mr. Quintin, too, Æneas thought, would pass muster as a father-in-law. Then he checked himself. In view of his poverty and their wealth such fancyings were useless; he determined to ask for a final settlement regarding Flotten from the father, and to be off before he got more deeply entangled by this mesh of attraction. However, it was, of course, impossible to leave immediately, and the mesh widened.

Lois herself had given one little rebuff to his fancyings—or was it a rebuff? He could not feel quite sure; it was such a small, simple thing, yet it produced a curious impression on Æneas.

He noticed her sitting at the end of the

verandah doing nothing; she never seemed to occupy herself in any way. She was in the same place in which he first had seen her; but sitting, and not standing, gazing at the river, her hands folded in her lap.

Æneas walked up, and sat on the stone balustrade facing her chair.

"Are you very fond of this place?" he questioned.

"Why, no," Lois answered; "I am not fond of anything."

"Not of *anything?*" laughed Æneas gently.

"Why, no!" she drawled; but there was a decision about those two words, a dreariness about them, which made him draw back and gaze keenly at her, and which for the moment checked any temptation he might have felt to say, "I want you to be fond of me."

She clearly did not wish to talk—or so it seemed to him—and, after a few moments, he walked off.

"I have to go and see your father," he had said; and she turned her large, animal-like eyes full on to him. The look drew him then, just as it always drew him; he leaned over her chair a little, and said:

"If you do go to Flotten, Miss Quintin, I should like you to grow fond of that . . . it's—it's rather a wonderful place, I think." The fixed gaze made him uncomfortable, whilst the pathos that seemed to lie behind it fascinated him; he flushed slightly, and added: "But after all, I dare say that's only my silly prejudice."

"Is that so?" said Miss Quintin, and Æneas walked off disconcerted, feeling somewhat foolish.

Mr. Quintin was in what he called his office —a veritable business-room, which contained a variety of telephones, stacks of papers, and a phonograph, into which he dictated letters at odd hours, when neither secretary nor typist were present. He looked up as Æneas came in, and then looked at his watch.

"You are not on time," he said.

"I'm so sorry," apologized Æneas. Eleven had been fixed for a final interview in respect of Flotten; it was now five minutes past that hour.

"It don't signify," rapped out Mr. Quintin, with a little laugh; "but you're *not* on time: I notice that."

"And put me down as an irregular and unbusiness-like man, I'm afraid. I stayed for a few minutes on the verandah to talk to Miss Quintin."

"Is that so?"

Mr. Quintin paused and leaned slightly forward towards Æneas. The determination and concentration now stamped upon his face made his success in business-matters easily understood. Æneas noticed it, and his original feeling in respect of the letting of Flotten intensified itself. Business was not in his line at all, but he vowed that, "concentrate" as Mr. Quintin might, he, Æneas, would not be "done"; he would insist, in every detail, on the terms Alexander Forbes had laid down.

"Will you marry my daughter?" Mr. Quintin said at last.

* * * * *

It came so suddenly: there were no preliminaries.

"I!" said Æneas.

"Yes, you," said Mr. Quintin. "Will you?"

It was a veritable thunderbolt: for a few moments Æneas was speechless. Then he said:

"I'd rather be quite straight with you, sir.

Your daughter is very beautiful. I should be a lucky chap, I know; but it's quite impossible. In the first place, Miss Quintin wouldn't take me; she has just told me she isn't fond of anything. In the next place, I can't afford to marry. I'm twenty-seven; I mean to make my mark and money at the Bar; but I haven't done anything yet—haven't even begun to put my back into it. I couldn't stand living on my wife's money—you see that. It's not possible."

A sudden twinge of the ridiculousness of the position crossed his mind; he almost wondered if he should add "Thank you very much all the same."

Mr. Quintin's face still bore its look of concentration.

"That's right," he said, "and very much what I expected of you. But there is another side to the question, and I'd like to put it before you. I'm a plain spoken man, Mr. Monteith. I've gone through the world saying just what I mean; it saves time and trouble. Our side of the question is this. We want Lois to marry. We want to get her right away from here into quite other surroundings. We want her to start a new life with new interests."

"Really," said Æneas, somewhat coldly—something seemed to be behind all this.

"Yes, really; and it is in the hope that she may marry and settle in Europe that I propose to take her there. That's why I want to lease a place. That's why I want to entertain."

"I hope you may be successful, I'm sure," said Æneas, unable to keep a hint of disdain from his tone. . . . "As regards the place, if you are still of opinion that Flotten would suit you, I shall be much obliged by your signing the agreement, and I will do the same. You know my passage is taken for the day after to-morrow. . . ."

Mr. Quintin ignored him and continued his theme. "Her mother thought the girl attracted you. But mothers are prejudiced creatures. . . . I'm sorry it's not so; she'll be snapped up fast enough when she gets to Europe, for the sake of her fortune. She's my only child. I'm worth six million pounds. . . ."

Æneas shrugged his shoulders. The scene galled him, galled both his pride and his taste. He rose and walked across to the window—a deep square bay, on a line with the end of the verandah.

Mr. Quintin's eyes followed him; their eager earnestness was pathetic.

"The money puts you off," he said. "I see that, and like you the better for it. That's the bother of the whole matter; I like you, Mrs. Quintin likes you, and, worst of all, Lois likes you. All my life I've had to deal with men. I know one when I see him. I can only say I'm very sorry. I should have felt my poor girl safe with you."

"Why your poor girl?" Æneas asked. He began to wonder what the mystery was.

"Because she had a very great trouble. She saw her only brother drown—her twin. She worshipped that boy, and he her. He was drowned out there before her eyes. Since then she has always been listless—the gaiety—her youthfulness—gone."

"Oh Lord, poor girl!" Æneas murmured, distress on his face; his brows knit.

"It will come right," said the father. "We've just got firmly to believe that it will. . . . Youth and health recover themselves—they must. But it shattered what she cared for most. Now we must set her on her feet again—get her a home of her own—little

children. It'll come—happiness will come. But you are the first stranger she has ever taken any interest in since then, and her mother says she speaks and thinks much of you—so I wish—I do wish. . . ."

It was hard for Æneas.

Pride and that strange desire were struggling together in his mind. He moved away and looked out of the window towards the verandah, and at that moment—doubtless also arranged by Fate—Lois, who, seated, had been invisible, rose from her chair and faced him. When she saw him, suddenly, for the first time that he had known, she smiled: and the long look held him once more. . . . Æneas's face flushed, his pulses throbbed. For three or four minutes he stood in silence—struggling with himself—watching Lois—then he turned, walked back to the table, and speaking very slowly:

"She is out there!" he said. "Mr. Quintin, I don't wish to hang back if you are satisfied. God knows, I want your daughter badly enough."

CHAPTER XII

THE shock and the distress she felt retarded Sybil's progress towards complete recovery. She seemed in some way deadened, inert, uninterested in things; and Fräulein Brentmann, who was alone with her, was not the best companion for a semi-invalid, and took no trouble to rouse her. Fräulein Brentmann had shared the Colquhouns' views on this marriage. At no time had she been in real sympathy with her pupil, but, during the lifetime of Sybil's parents, that had not mattered greatly—and she was an excellent instructress, and entirely trustworthy. She had greatly admired and liked the late Lord Colquhoun, and after his death had certainly softened, and been very kind to his young daughter. Now, however, all through this trouble, and during the engagement and marriage, she was entirely apart — not understanding — there, simply

because it was her duty; and she was paid to be there.

Fräulein Brentmann walked into the boudoir one morning where Sybil was—with the baby. She took no notice of the baby, nodded good-morning to Sybil, and, adjusting her glasses, poised her short, fat little person on the edge of a chair.

"I propos," said she, in her gutteral English, which never improved, and sounded as though her mouth were full of plums, "I propos *vorlesen*—I shall read aloud to you ze leading ardicles from ze *Scodsman*."

Sybil was dismayed. She was feeling rather cheerier than usual, the weather was lovely, and she had had pleasant letters by the post. She longed for someone to chat with—someone sympathetic; she was in no mood for leading articles.

"So very kind," she said, "but I want to talk to you a little first; do you mind?"

"*Ach* no!" said Fräulein Brentmann, and leaned back, and laid the paper on her—slope; no one could call it a lap. When she leaned back in this fashion, with her feet straight before her raised on a footstool, she would

have made quite a good slide from chin to toe.

"I am thinking of having baby christened," said Sybil. "She's ten weeks old next Friday. She shall be christened and called Elizabeth, after her Monteith grandmother—and I think I shall ask Lady Monteith to come from Edinburgh and be godmother. I have such a sweet little note from her this morning. I believe I might venture. She says her son is thinking of letting Flotten to an American—so droll of him that seems?"

"Der is no godmuzzers in ze Scodch Church," mouthed Fräulein Brentmann.

"Oh, but Elizabeth isn't going to be baptized into the Scotch Church. You would not like it, would you, Adorable? She really *is* rather sweet! Isn't it enticing of her not to have a horrid bald head, Fräulein! . . . No! she shall be a little Church of Englandy-wing-landy—bless her!—and have nice kind Lady Monteith for a godmuffer."

She raised the baby bundle in her arms, bent, and kissed it. . . .

Tact had never been a strong factor in Fräulein Brentmann's character. Hers were

the methods of the bull in the china shop. She blurted things out. She blurted out now something which had not occurred to Sybil's extremely uncalculating mind.

"But Lady Mondeith, she is ze muzzer of dies yong man your baby 'as disin'erided. Ver' kind she should write to you at all, I zink; but impossible for you to ask her such a zing as dat."

Sybil stood still. It seemed her heart stood still, too. What was this?

"Disinherited!" she said faintly.

"Of course!" continued Fräulein Brentmann. "*Natürlich!* if you 'ad not married Sir Æneas, if your child 'ad not been born, everyding would 'ave gone to dat family."

She stooped to pick up the *Scotsman* which had fallen from the slope.

"I have not seen the will—I don't fully know about it yet; but, anyhow, Mr. Monteith has Flotten—and that is the chief place."

"But," said Fräulein Brentmann, "I 'ear it is a drouble to 'im, un dat is all. He 'as Flotten, but he 'as no money ad all. He now must work ver' 'ard, and abandon 'is candidature to Parliament. It is not so ver' droll of 'im to

let to an American per'aps. Now, shall I read to you ze leading ardicles?" She cleared her throat.

"Oh dear, no, thank you," said Sybil with impatience. "I'm sorry; but I don't in the least want to be read to."

"Oh, ver' well; I go away and read to myself." And Fräulein Brentmann went. She had, indeed, accomplished a wonderful morning's work.

Of all the shocks the last few months had provided, the realization of the effect of her hasty marriage upon Æneas's life was perhaps the greatest.

Æneas, blue-eyed and frank-faced, straightforward, and above all manly, had—although she was scarcely aware of it—become very dear to Sybil. They were friends from the first. She had always been glad to hear of his coming—sorry to hear of his going. She told herself that she relied on him. She saw now that she did a great deal more than that. Suddenly she saw in him the Fairy Prince she had renounced. She recollected the unaccountable new feeling she had experienced that day by the burnside, when he had stood

still and looked at her—and now knew what that meant. She was falling in love with him: unknowingly she had already done it. She did love him. He was the Prince! And to realize that, in the same instant she realized that it was she who had wrecked his prospects, to say the least was bitter.

Sybil's was not an introspective nature; but she put herself under a microscope now, and Æneas held it.

She saw under that glass two despicable little figures—which, she wondered, did he believe her to be? The Becky Sharp who had schemed and striven to catch the old man, or the selfish and worldly young person, who had jumped at the goods the gods provided, with a sigh at the accompanying ogre.

Æneas would never know the truth—how it all happened—and why she married. Heavens! What a gentleman he was! How splendidly he had treated her; and Heavens! what a fool she had been; and how her proclivity for *not* asking questions had come home to roost!

The baby cried. With a feverish hand she rang the bell, and demanded to have "this child taken away."

The poor baby! She, too, was included in that morning's storm of passionate resentment.

Sybil spent most of the day alone. She sent a message of apology to Fräulein Brentmann for not coming to luncheon, and she kept to her own rooms, and fought things out. By the evening she was in a calmer frame of mind, for she had evolved a scheme—a great and comforting scheme.

So far Sybil was not acquainted with the precise terms of the will—she knew roughly that Flotten had gone to Æneas and Droon to her little girl, but she had not asked any questions as to money—had, indeed, said that she would prefer to go into "all that" later, and this had been accepted with some thankfulness, since her health was not fully restored. She, therefore, formed her scheme on the presumption that the Monteith fortune was at her disposal, and she decided that she herself would take Flotten if it had to be let.

She would keep open house; she would further Æneas's candidature—he could afford to stand if Flotten were off his hands—and she would work for him heart and soul. She

would do everything he wished, and spend the Monteith money like water for him! He must not know it—of course—for he would never allow it. But, all the same, the wheels would be greased; and she would be the goddess *ex machina!*

It was a comforting programme! Standing on the balcony of her boudoir, visualizing the things that she could do, her eyes shone; the soft air from the sea brought hope and peace, and the sunshine caught the brightness of her hair, and made it gleam like burnished copper—a halo of the self-sacrifice that was to be.

It occurred to her that the first thing to do was to write to Lady Monteith—it was essential to be good friends with her.

"DEAR LADY MONTEITH" (wrote Sybil),

"I do thank you so heartily for the most kind letter you sent to me, and I must tell you how much I long to know you better. I wonder whether you would come to stay here? If you would, it will be the keenest pleasure to me. Only it is very, *very* quiet. My old governess, Fräulein Brentmann, and I are here quite alone, and she leaves at the

beginning of next week. I am perfectly well and strong again now.

"So, greatly hoping that perhaps you will come, and thanking you again for your letter,

"Yours sincerely,

"SYBIL MONTEITH."

Lady Monteith accepted the invitation, although her going was inevitably postponed for a few weeks. In the middle of June she arrived, and Sybil awaited her in the great drawing-room—an immense many-windowed room. She felt strangely excited, and looked very lovely; the softly falling gown of unrelieved black was as becoming to her as anything could possibly be; and, as she moved down that long room to welcome the elder lady, she (that elder lady) was struck by the grace and stateliness of the tall, lithe figure.

"Dear Sybil!" said she, "I may call you Sybil, may I not?" She opened her arms. She was all and far more than Sybil had dreamed of; sweet-faced and gracious—the very epitome of motherliness, and almost Quaker-like in the simple style of her dress.

"I wish I could have come before," she said;

"but you know Mr. Forbes fell ill, and Æneas went to America in his place—I told you in my note, did I not? I had to stay to see him off; and then Leslie—my husband—wished me to go to Berwick with him for a week; and so it has all happened. Dear me! how nice that tea will be—and tell me about yourself, dear."

Sybil had not very much to tell.

So Lady Monteith began to talk again.

"Now there is *such* news of Æneas!" she said.

"He is well?" Sybil asked quickly; she seemed to catch a tone of anxiety in the other's voice.

"Yes; yes; he is quite well; but it has all been so extraordinary and so absolutely unexpected that we cannot take it in as yet. Æneas has engaged himself to be married. The lady is a Miss Lois Quintin—daughter, in fact, of the man who proposes to take Flotten. They are quite phenomenally rich. Æneas will have money galore at his disposal—that is almost all his father and I know. I do so wish we knew more. . . . And he is going to marry the young lady before we can possibly

see her! They are to be married practically at once—in Quebec; and his father is tied at home by work. You may imagine it has taken our breath away!"

Sybil had replaced the teapot on the tray, and leaned against the cushions behind her. She was in sharp, physical pain; a knife seemed to be going through her body. But she controlled both voice and expression.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "this really is exciting."

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CHAPTER XIII

ÆNEAS MONTEITH'S courtship was a strange one. If Lois had been eating her heart out she had apparently done so efficaciously. Ardent as her suitor was inclined to be, she damped him, and his ardour vacillated.

"Tell me, Lois," he said one day, slipping his arm round her waist, "tell me—are you fond of anything now?" He laughed, and looked down into her face.

She was silent, and in that moment of silence infinite space seemed to separate them. Æneas released his hold, indefinably repelled; he almost hoped she would say "No," but Lois turned, gazed at him, and smiled.

"I am fond of you," she said; a drawling emphasis on the pronoun.

More than once, during the eighteen days of their engagement, Æneas was prompted by his better judgment to give this marriage up.

Reason told him that he would find no help-meet in Lois—no companion with whom he could ultimately share the interests each formed in life. Reason whispered all this to him, but the call of that strange physical attraction—the almost snakelike fascination—was stronger. There was a pathos about the girl, too, and the sense of it quickened after a talk he had one morning with her mother, and the explanation she gave of Lois's silence.

"You know," Mrs. Quintin said, "that Lois had a twin-brother, and she just adored him. They did everything together. But three years ago he was drowned right there before her eyes. That's why Lois always stands at that end of the verandah, looking—where she saw the boat go down."

"Yes!" said Æneas. "Her father told me."

"Oh, it was awful. I scarcely know whether I suffered most by the death of my dear boy, or by the agonies Lois passed through.

"You poor Mrs. Quintin!" Æneas said, leaning nearer, looking with the kindest, truest of blue eyes into her face; once a very pretty face, now changed by suffering—thin and drawn.

"You are a dear, good fellow, and I am real glad you are going to be my son-in-law."

She held out a white, sensitive hand; Æneas, bending, gently kissed it.

"Lois is twenty now, and that happened three years ago. Since then she has never taken any interest in anything, or in anyone, till she saw you. She says there is something in you that is like Nathaniel; I can now see what she means. She was just drawn to you from the very first moment."

"Was she?" said Æneas. "Yes, I well recollect how she looked at me: it puzzled me at the time."

"She was drawn to you from the very first," Mrs. Quintin repeated.

They sat silent for a moment or two, then—

"Wouldn't it be much better for her not always to be there and looking? Isn't she happier away from here? I almost wonder you let her be here at all," he said.

"We tried going away," said Mrs. Quintin quietly, "but it didn't answer. We tried that as soon as possibly could be. Her father thought of everything, did everything in his power,

but she just fretted to get back. She cried so terribly! I called the doctors in; it seemed as though she must harm herself crying in that way. She used to sob" (Mrs. Quintin raised her hands to her ears and covered them—the little gesture, the look upon her face, spoke volumes)—"she used to sob—well, as I tell you, I thought she *must* harm herself. I had her heart tested twice, but that was sound. She always wished to come back here, and the doctor advised doing as she liked. So her father fixed to return, and since then she never cries, but she has seemed frozen. She's had to wait for you to rouse her. That's the way it's been."

"Mrs. Quintin, sometimes I feel that is precisely what I do not do. I feel that I don't rouse Lois. Do you know, I have sometimes even felt that she doesn't care for me, and wondered whether it were really right for us to be married. Now, more even than I dreamed of depends on it! I always wanted to make my wife a happy woman—and I want to be happy myself," he added simply.

Then his attention was caught by the

nervous movement of Mrs. Quintin's hands—the strange fashion in which she was clasping and unclasping her fingers.

"You will just kill my girl if you change your mind—if you throw her over," she said. "You will just kill her."

It puzzled him vaguely; he was annoyed.

"I have no intention of throwing her over," he answered a little coldly, "only I wish——"

He broke off, without saying that he wished Lois would be rather more responsive. Perhaps the mother guessed it—perhaps she spoke to Lois. Certain it is that that evening Lois did show more animation; her cheeks were ever so slightly flushed, and, wearing a gown of cherry-coloured chiffon, a narrow diamond bandeau laid across the waves of black hair, her strange statuesque beauty was emphasized and intensified. That evening, too, she made her first little demonstration of affection.

"You do look so beautiful, Lois," Æneas whispered to her; and she actually slipped an arm through his.

"It is because I am fond of something," she

answered softly; "it is because I am fond of you."

Again the drawling of the pronoun.

After the wedding they sailed at once for Europe and landed at Liverpool. Æneas's plan had been to go direct to the London house, and thence, in a few days' time, to make their way to the North; but for some surprising reason Lois declined to leave Liverpool. She showed unsuspected temper and great obstinacy, and for one whole day she shut herself into her rooms in the Lime Street Hotel, and declined to admit anyone, not even her maid.

Æneas was dumfoundered. He descended in his bewilderment to questioning the maid on the subject.

"What—what do you think is the matter?" he inquired. "You have been with Mrs. Monteith for some considerable time, I believe."

He thought of adding "I, of course, don't really know anything about her," but he refrained. The maid could not say—she had seen her mistress cry bitterly, and had known her silent and very sad, but she had never

known her show temper before. Of course, these last two weeks have been tiring, and "I guess she may be a bit overwrought," she added.

"Really!" said Æneas.

On the second day Lois opened her door and admitted meals and her maid; she was hungry, perhaps. On the third she announced her readiness to proceed to London, and she behaved to Æneas, whom she had not seen since they landed, precisely as though nothing unusual had occurred, so he left the matter at that. But, later, when in the train he sat close to her, and said caressingly, "We are going home together now, Lois; you are my wife! The London house isn't really home to be sure, but it's a good old stepping-stone to the happy times we shall have, you and I. Are you glad?"

"Yes," said Lois.

"Well, give me a kiss," he said; "I haven't had one for an age. I haven't had a proper one at all!"

He slipped an arm round her, and bent his head to hers.

She jerked herself quickly free, and hit him

in the chest with all her might and main. Her face was deathly white, her eyes glittering.

Anger rose in him, too. He gripped both her hands, and for the fraction of a second let her feel his strength. Then he loosed them, shrugged his shoulders, and moved away.

"This is pleasant," he remarked. "We shall indeed have a happy home at this pace."

Lois absolutely ignored him. She made no reply at all; she simply turned her head, and looked out of the window. At the first stop Æneas moved into a smoking-carriage and sought consolation from his pipe. And so this journey ended.

On the drive from the station to Grosvenor Square Lois was taciturn. When he spoke to her she ignored him. Finally, they arrived, and found the whole household gathered in the hall to welcome the bride. Mrs. Reeves, the housekeeper, had held that office for thirty years. She was an old-fashioned person, and liked old-fashioned customs; this, in her opinion, was the proper thing to do.

Lois passed up the steps and into the hall with an entirely detached air. Apparently

she saw nothing and no one. She disregarded Mrs. Reeves, who stood side by side with the venerable butler and curtsied, whilst he bowed low.

"Lois, Lois!" Æneas called gently; but she passed on, white-faced, with immovable features. "Lois! Will you not like to speak to Mrs. Reeves?" But already she was going up the staircase—her maid hurrying across the hall to follow her. Seeing she did not intend to stop, Æneas did not emphasize her going: he just let her go; but he remained himself, shook hands, and, in his own charming way, quickly satisfied everyone; thanking them for their welcome. Then, disappointed, somewhat humiliated, he followed his wife.

She was in the drawing-room. He heard her voice there, and found her standing in front of a cabinet of china.

"Lois," he said, "why would you not let the servants welcome you, or speak to them?"

She turned—drew back the full, red lips, and showed all her teeth.

"Lois!"

He took a step nearer, passing his hand

across his forehead; he seemed to be in the midst of a nightmare.

For reply, she raised the umbrella she held, and swept the cabinet—scattering Sèvres and Dresden china; shivering them to atoms on the floor, shrieking with unholy laughter at the havoc.

CHAPTER XIV

TEN days or so later Æneas found himself once more in the old familiar quarters of his father's house in Moray Place. He awoke in the bedroom which held mementoes of most of the stages and events in his life—photographs of groups at his house-master's at Eton; groups at the 'Varsity; a pair of sculls and cups he had won by his prowess as a "wet Bob"; a great many photographs of horses—hunting crops and stirrups; the brush of his first fox; books of all sorts and kinds, belonging also to various stages, from "Tom Brown's School-days" to learned dissertations on the law.

He awoke; and with awakening came the half-conscious sense of calamity—of oppression. That happened every morning now—full realization of the facts always took a moment or so. He turned on to his back, stretched his long limbs, and yawned.

What was it again? Ah yes! to be sure; he was married! Married to a hopeless lunatic, who enjoyed magnificent physical health.

Poor Lois!

The door opened very softly, and his mother looked in. "Oh! you are awake, darling boy," she said.

"Yes—is it shockingly late?"

"No, it's half-past seven—it's shockingly early; but I wanted to see you first myself. I've got a nice cup of tea for you in case you were awake. Dear me, both windows wide open! There's a positive gale in here, Æneas."

The door shut with a small slam, and Lady Monteith whisked round the train of the soft white dressing-gown she wore, and prevented herself being caught in it. She smiled. . . .

"Well missed!" said Æneas. "Why, this is luxury, mother."

He was touched by the little unusual attention, by the wistful look in her eyes—as she came and seated herself on the edge of his bed.

"There! I'm sure this tea is good. Do you know, father says tea is my great extravagance! and I made it myself. Oh! what a

touzled head of hair." She passed her hand through it. "When you were a little boy you had the most lovely crop of curls. I never did see such lovely curls as they were! Father used to make me cut them short—I *so* hated cutting them!"

There was a pause. Æneas knew well enough that his mother was yearning to help: that he might speak to her of the thing which had befallen him. The Judge understood his silence, but to Lady Monteith it came very hard. Her son had, as it were, closed the door of that chamber and sealed it. No word of his wife had crossed his lips, no word of her people who had trapped and caught him—as he now imagined—at the very outset of his career.

"Oh, Leslie, I *must* talk to him!" Lady Monteith moaned to her husband.

"Don't," said the Judge, "let him speak when he wants to. Give the boy time."

It was the wiser plan.

A few days later letters came from Murray Bay—dismayed letters to Æneas from both Mr. and Mrs. Quintin, and letters from Mr. Quintin, too, on business matters, written to

Alexander Forbes. The writer was following the letters by the next mail: his proposals necessitated discussion. The Judge, Æneas, and Mr. Forbes discussed them in the former's study.

Mr. Quintin offered to take Flotten on lease for twenty-one years, or to increase the settlement on Æneas to £50,000 a year, which would put him in the same position as regards money that he would have held had Lois lived with him as his wife.

There was apparently nothing that Mr. Quintin would not pay—no reparation money might provide which he was not willing, and much more than willing—to offer. His letter to the agent was lavish in its profuseness. It disgusted Æneas.

'Let him pay for his own unfortunate daughter," he said; "I think he should; but as to his settlements, never let me hear of them again. See him! no, certainly I won't see him—nothing would induce me. You can also tell him from me if you like, that I'd rather Flotten were in ruins than let it to him. What is more, if paranoia can be proved, I shall sue for an annulment of the marriage."

Mr. Forbes snapped an elastic band round the sheaf of papers he held in his hand, and looked first at Æneas, then at Lord Monteith. An expression of incredulity, amounting to bewilderment was on his face; combined with the most intense annoyance.

Here—in the point of view of this transaction—certain characteristics of the Highlander and the Lowlander were exemplified.

Mr. Forbes, of Lowland extraction, was eminently practical—an upright and a good man, but a man of keen business instincts. The Highland pride and resentment were incomprehensible to him; the cutting off of one's nose to spite one's face a mere absurdity. "If the man deceived you, let him pay for it," he said.

"If he deceived me," answered Æneas, with blazing eyes, "he damned well shall *not* buy himself off. What's money to him? He's got six million of it. He would *like* to pay—of course he would—it would salve his conscience. I say he shall *not* pay me!"

"But the estate!" Mr. Forbes persisted; "it makes the whole difference in the world. Half the sum he offers would make all the

difference. Take half of what he offers—take your original settlement." He pushed his spectacles low on to his nose and looked over the top of them, but Æneas gave no sign whatever. "Droon, too—think what money would mean there."

"Lady Monteith will have to marry it," Æneas flung out, with an entirely unpleasant laugh.

"My lord!" In despair the agent turned to Lord Monteith, appeal in his voice; surely the Judge would endeavour to prevent such madness.

"It is useless," said that gentleman; "this time I cannot influence my son, and, upon my soul, I'm not certain but that I agree with him."

CHAPTER XV

It was all very tragic. There was no doubt about it, that had Æneas been looking on at his own affairs and not the central figure in them, he would have considered them tragic. But happily the figures in the big tragedies of life, with few exceptions, move on their way not thinking too much about themselves; and so Æneas moved on his.

The circumstances of his marriage had been carefully gone into; he had had the best possible advice, and there was no chance of release. Lois had never suffered from delusions. She had been wretched, listless, sad; but never other than perfectly sane. Marriage, happiness, and affection, would, the doctors had said, be the complete restorative; get her to Europe if possible, get her a new home—entirely away from old associations. But Lois, till Æneas arrived, turned from

every man. If spoken to she would answer, and, at the earliest opportunity, walk off. With Æneas she had not been like that; from the first, as her mother said, she let him talk to her, sit with her. She did not shun him, and she owned that she liked him. In spite of the fact that—as a Christian Scientist—she was supposed not to believe in nervousness, nervousness had seized Mrs. Quintin that morning when she sat with Æneas, and spoke of the accident out there in the St. Lawrence River; nervousness seized her when he said that he wondered if Lois really cared for him—if it were "really right" for them to be married. A second shock might indeed kill Lois. Worse than nervousness, a sharp anxiety consumed the mother; she could rest neither night nor day till the indissoluble knot should be tied. . . . It was she who forced the wedding on so quickly, fearful lest Æneas might change his mind—fearful of any hitch. And Lois was unwontedly bustled and flurried, and called upon for decisions. . . . She had seemed more animated under it all—happier—until they sailed. Then she grew silent and sad, and

kept much to her cabin. These facts the lawyer elicited, but none of them helped. There had assuredly been no previous insanity, yet now, so far as the doctors could predict, the case was hopeless.

There was no possibility of a release. And so life lay ahead.

Æneas settled once again into his chambers in the Temple, and the harder he worked, the more success he had, the more he wished for. Ambition was laying hold upon him. He began to feel the quickening of latent powers within himself, as a baby first comes to recognize its power to walk. Possibilities—nay, certainties he believed—were revealing themselves to him; the certainty of success. His brains, emotions, instinct, all worked quickly. Sometimes when he could spare the time he would sit in court (for instruction), listening to an appeal by learned counsel, or to the summing-up of a Judge: and he would mentally appeal on the same issue, or sum up the same case. He did it easily and well, and realized that fact. Occasionally it seemed to him he could have made points which they missed. The fortune he set out to make

might yet be his, he believed, provided he stuck hard to work, and read hard.

He went to his parents in Edinburgh for a few days over Christmas and the New Year, but, otherwise, scarcely left London. His father—in town himself during the earlier part of the New Year—was delighted at the zeal Æneas showed, and the success he appeared to have had; but a trifle disconcerted by a very perceptible undercurrent of recklessness. "Don't wear yourself out, my boy," he said; "you're living hard in every way, it seems to me."

"Yes, I'm living hard, in every way," Æneas had answered. "Why not? . . . And I'm making a speciality of the divorce laws, too" —he looked his father in the face and laughed. "I've got an article coming out in the *Quarterly* some time on the Divine institution of marriage and the finite institution of divorce: purely legal," he added.

"You are not cutting Society either," said the Judge. "Your mother tells me she hears of you at various places."

"No, I'm not cutting it. . . . Not so very keen about it though—the kind with the

biggest S—haven't much time to spare for that."

The Judge looked at him and considered, but made no comment.

"You will have to make time very shortly, I think, to go up to Droon and see into the affairs of the young lady up there. We invited her to come to us, but she has not been, and somehow I think your mother is glad; she had a curious shrinking from seeing that girl. I don't understand why, for she so much liked her."

"I understand why," said Æneas. "She is afraid of her sympathy. Sybil is wonderfully sympathetic; and poor old mother's got a lot on her heart——" He broke off, kept silence a moment, then added pensively: "I feel I've treated Sybil rather badly. I've never been near the place since that executorship business was finished."

"You must go," said the Judge. "Forbes presses it very much."

"Yes, I must go; but what is to be done when I get there? She is spending too much money, that's what Forbes wants me to tell her. I know that; but what on earth is to be

done? It is unavoidable. Of course she always will spend too much money, a good many thousands a year too much. It's all thanks to that outrageous will."

In July Æneas wrote to Sybil, inviting himself to Droon, "if convenient to her." She read his letter over and over again.

During the year which had elapsed, she had struggled to shut her heart and mind to Æneas. She had purposely alienated herself from him and from his family. During this year of her widowhood she had lived very quietly; not leaving Droon, and only asking there one or two friends of old days—people unacquainted with the Monteiths. True, his parents had invited her to Moray Place, and she had asked them to Droon; but in neither case had the plan been carried out, and Sybil had not regretted it, for—now that Æneas was so immensely wealthy—neither she nor her money could help him. Moreover, Sybil had discovered that she herself was hampered by the want of money. She had to be told about the will; and Mr. Forbes had told her, but made no explanation; and it remained to her

the greatest and most amazing puzzle that her husband should have acted so. Anyway, it was very clear that she could never help Æneas, was quite out of his life; and to see his mother now, would merely reopen the sore she struggled so hard to close.

But now Æneas himself was coming. "Unless you wire," he wrote. He seemed to take it absolutely for granted that she would receive him; and of course he took it for granted! What conceivable reason could there be against it, so far as he would ever know.

Sybil had actually forgotten his trusteeship! Mr. Forbes seemed to have fallen so comfortably into her scheme for ignoring Æneas that his name was never mentioned. She had forgotten that they were joint trustees, and that Æneas would be bound to turn up at intervals. And he was coming now! The thought set her veins a-tingle. All the feelings she had spent months in killing woke, for they had never died. She covered her face with her hands and made a little sound, half laugh, half sob. Æneas was coming! Of course he was coming. She must see him eventually, there-

fore better now, better quickly — better as quickly as possible.

Æneas was coming. . . . And he came.

It was a magnificent night—one of those nights one gets sometimes in the Western Highlands, when all the qualities of beauty appear to concentrate themselves.

". . . parting day
Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues
With a new colour as it gasps away,
The last still loveliest, till—'tis gone—and all is grey."

A table with coffee, liqueurs, and cigars had been placed on the terrace by the ramparts, and thither, having finished dinner, Sybil and Æneas made their way. He wore the Highland dress, as was his custom when in those parts. She was in a black picture dress of chiffon, and her wonderful burnished hair was held by a curious snood of finely cut jet. She walked rather rapidly to the ramparts, and stood erect and quiet, looking now to the right, now to the left. Æneas had followed, and was close beside her. The waves below rose gently, and receded with rhythmic sound. The piper paced to and fro on the western

side of the house. "My Native Highland Home" he was playing.

"What beauty!" Sybil said softly.

"What beauty!" Æneas answered; but he thought not merely of the glories of the night —the shimmering long streak of moonlight on the water, the outline of the opposite hills against the sky—he thought not only of these, but of the beautiful woman beside him— the delicate poise of her head—the grace of her.

Both were silent for a few moments, then a company of shooting stars caused Sybil to exclaim:

"Ah, see! Such a pity! down to earth out of all the loftiness—the radiance up there to-night! What makes a star do a thing like that?" (She turned, as though disenchanted.) "Dear me, I forgot the coffee. How atrocious of me! And when he fell, he fell like Lucifer— never to rise again! (One lump of sugar, isn't it?) It would be interesting to know what one would do if one were a star. Would one be a Lucifer? or would one sit and twinkle, twinkle —good, but rather dull?"

"I don't know about that," said Æneas,

lighting a cigar; "if stars can see half that goes on in this old planet, no wonder they twinkle, and, by Jove! it can't be dull."

"I didn't think of that," said Sybil pensively.

"Moreover," he pursued, "the other plan don't seem to give the star much fun for his money. It's an awful example of *facilis est*. He's no sooner started than he's arrived. I wonder whether, to the inhabitants of some other world, the descent to Avernus of one of us here appears as rapid and as futile!"

Sybil made no reply; she sipped her coffee, and watched Æneas, who still stood beside the rampart, his profile towards her; a fine silhouetted figure of a man.

For a moment or two they kept silence; the piper had finished his piping, and had gone.

Æneas spoke first; he came and seated himself near her:

"Are you very lonely up here?" he asked.

"No, I'm not lonely. I love the country so much, and many of the people. I ride, fish, play with Elizabeth—and have long talks with Mr. Morrison. He's a wonderful old man, and extraordinarily good to me. Then there is the library; and, of course, sometimes people

come to stay. Your mother came once, Æneas, but that is a year ago. I asked her again—and your father too—but they refused."

"Yes, I heard she'd been. I'm so glad you are friends."

"Yes," said Sybil—a little coldly he thought. After a moment she added, "Tell me about yourself. I should like to hear all about your wife, too. What—what is she like?"

Æneas rose, and flung his cigar over the rampart into the water below; there was a curious unnatural hollow tone in his voice when he spoke, but Sybil—filled by the painfulness of the subject to herself, yet determined to break the ice—did not notice it.

"Do you mean to say you haven't heard?"

"I haven't heard a single thing," she interrupted, "except that you were to be married, and were married, in Quebec last year. You didn't even write and say 'Thank you' for my nice wedding-present!" She gave a little laugh.

"Then you don't know what happened," said Æneas; and this time she heard the strained tone.

"No."

She stood up, and took a step towards him. She had turned very white.

"What happened?"

"I—well, my wife went mad. The worst—the outbreak—came when we got to London. She's in an asylum, poor girl, and they say it's hopeless."

A very tempest of feeling surged through Sybil. Involuntarily she put her hand to her throat; something choked her.

Æneas looked at her and she at him. All that she had wished to conceal was in her eyes, and even in half-darkness such things are visible. A trifle nearer Æneas leaned, bending over her, and though she knew that he was reading the secret, she didn't care. She was glad.

For a moment longer, the fraction of a moment, she still looked; and she felt steadier, almost composed once more.

"As you were saying," she remarked, in her drawling soft voice, "small wonder the stars twinkle."

CHAPTER XVI

THE remainder of the evening, with unspoken thoughts at the back of their minds, had been hard to get through. Æneas never so much as approached the business matters on which he had gone to Droon. He smoked, practically in silence, whilst Sybil made a number of disconnected and sporadic comments on the weather and the baby.

"This conversation lags," she said very soon. "It is impossible. To-morrow things will be better; to-night has—has been too illuminating. Good-night, Æneas."

"Good-night," he said.

He made one step towards her, but she moved back. In the morning he had gone; there was a note left for her.

"I want to see you some time to talk business—in connection with the trust. A

little later on I will come—if that be quite convenient to you. Meantime, God bless you;

"ÆNEAS."

The closing four words of the letter were the only ones which interested Sybil, "Meantime, God bless you."

She was in a singularly latent frame of mind; things were just happening—she determined to regard herself as the pawn of Fate—she would neither let nor hinder—she would remain entirely passive, as a pawn should.

Æneas took things differently. The discovery which he had made had been unexpected; yet, having made it, it appeared as no discovery at all, but an eternal truth. Surely since all time he had loved Sybil; surely since all time she had loved him. He was stirred to the depth of his being.

Then he tried to tell himself that this was an hallucination—the night had bewitched them, and Sybil was easily swayed. "She is an emotional creature," he told himself. Over and over again he said it. "She is an emotional creature." It was momentary; pity moved her—that was it. She had felt sorry.

But in his heart of hearts Æneas knew

that he had not been deceived. He was "fey." He looked into the future, and he knew that this love which he must thrust from himself—which must be plucked as a brand from the burning—this love was the real, the big thing, in his life.

He went to Edinburgh, to his father's house, and he added a diatribe to the article on "Divorce":

"By these indissoluble marriages, when for some reason they prove abortive—devoid, that is, of love, which is the essence of the Divine upon this earth—by these indissoluble marriages you create situations dubbed 'immoral' or 'vicious' by those very persons who defend the indissoluble tie. Love is the sanctification of marriage, and the woman who lives *maritalement* in a loveless union is on a moral level with a lady of the pavement; indeed, her position is less understandable when her daily bread is provided.

"If the couple have sufficient self-respect to lead their lives apart, a premium is put upon 'immorality' so called—that is, upon the natural intercourse of the sexes, which will take place just the same whether blessed

or banned. . . . And worst, and most far-reaching result, by these indissoluble marriages you sap the usefulness of human lives. 'L'union fait la force.' Let the two who can row in the same boat pull together in it whilst they may—'l'union fait la force!' With their long, steady pull, while faith and peace and love are within them, their boat shall weather storms, and the poor little rocking craft be steadied in the lee of it. And should one or the other begin, unhappily, to pull against the partner, is there not more chance of a readjustment when chains, which can never be eased, do not cut into the flesh at the same time?"

Æneas had been writing at a feverish pace. As he finished the sentence, he rose, flung the pen on to the table, and "Bah! what high-falutin' stuff, and what's the good of it?" he said.

He walked over to the fireplace, and, standing there, with his back to the fire, began to fill his pipe with more vigour and force than argued well for the smoking of it.

The door opened, and his father appeared.

"Still up?" said the Judge, surprised. "I've got a very difficult case to decide to-morrow, and have been going over the evidence once

more. But it's two o'clock; did you know that?"

"Dad!" Æneas burst forth, using the old name of childhood which he seldom used now —"dad! I'm infernally miserable. I feel like some poor devil of a chained kennel dog."

He made the statement quite simply yet tensely; and it was so unlike Æneas that it cut Lord Monteith to the quick.

"My boy!" he said, and Æneas, looking at him, saw the distress upon his face, and fatigue, too.

"Dear old dad, what a selfish brute I am! You're tired out—you get off to bed, sir; there's nothing really wrong with me. I've got the hump, that's all."

He smiled the familiar smile which the Judge knew and loved, and, slipping an arm through his father's, tried to direct him to the door.

"No, no. I want a whisky and soda; I came here purposely to get one."

Æneas fetched it, and the Judge sat down and lighted a cigar.

"Now, Æneas, what is it? Let me try to help you."

Æneas puffed at his pipe, still standing by

the fire. His father let him take his time; did not hurry him.

"It's this marriage of mine," Æneas said at last.

"Ah!" Then, after a short pause: "Have you further news of the poor girl?"

"No; nothing different. Her father and mother write each quarter, and send that money. I return the money, of course, and I read the letters. His, give the doctors' account of Lois; hers are very touching. I have quite come to believe that neither of them ever contemplated such an end as this. They thought everything would be "just lovely" once we were married, as Mrs. Quintin used to say to me. They are optimists, Christian Scientists, or something of the kind I understand, but I suppose they were half-hearted: or anyway, they took it up too late for poor Lois. She is not often violent now, they say, but hopelessly ill as regards her mind—physique magnificent, of course; it always is with those people." He hesitated a moment, then: "So there we are, for the remainder of our lives, presumably. The infernal luck of it, being married in Quebec, the States and their laws

within a stone's-throw! However, there we are, chained kennel dogs, I say——"

"And you wish to be unchained?" questioned the Judge.

"I do," said Æneas curtly.

"Ah!"

Again there was silence. The Judge looked keenly at his son, as though reading him. Æneas still puffed at his pipe—each puff becoming shorter and more rapid: suddenly he burst forth:

"Of course I do. Lord above us! I'm not a nun, nor a stained-glass figure of a man—I want to live."

"But what prevents you?" asked the Judge. "You are singularly free—the Law, under the circumstances, would certainly make no claim against you, and Society would close her eyes—besides, it's not necessary to take Society into your confidence, is it? Many an unfortunate married man would be thankful to change places with you."

"I know it," said Æneas, "thanks to the Law."

"The Law is an ass," quoted the Judge, with rather a wan smile.

"Human nature," Æneas went on savagely, "being what it is—man wants a partner—a companion—a home—he wants one woman."

"In short, you wish to be free to marry again?"

"I do."

"Ah! that is a complication undoubtedly. And you wish to marry a specific lady I gather?"

"Of course; certainly."

This time the pause of silence was longer than before. When Lord Monteith spoke he rose also from his chair, and threw the remainder of his cigar into the fire; his face looked grey and sad.

"Your duty is—at least—obvious. You must involve no one else in this trouble. Whoever the lady may be keep away from her. . . . Keep right away from her, and WORK. . . . It is the only thing I can say to you, my poor boy. . . ."

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CHAPTER XVII

WITH a person of Sybil Monteith's temperament it was, of course, unavoidable that the passive state should be succeeded very quickly by a turmoil.

Sybil was haunted, pursued now by a thousand devils of doubt. What did Æneas think about her? What did he feel about her? What did he feel about his wife? Why had all this happened? Bad enough that she should have disinherited him! Then back to—after all what *had* happened? Much to her—but had anything happened to him?—"Meantime, God bless you."

When he went rain was coming down in a dreary drizzle from the sky of leaden grey; the stars that night had retired in tears. She tried to read, but could not occupy herself in that way. She dressed in rough tweed and went for a tramp, turning to the right behind the

house—through the sheltered kitchen-garden—out at a little gate at the end, to the right again, and so on to the moor. Such a long, even, lonely stretch as it looked, and the heather—in the dull light—colourless too. It occurred to Sybil that her life lay illustrated before her—even—colourless—lonely. Because she was emotional tears came to her eyes at the thought, and she gave a little sob. Then she laughed that she should be taking herself so seriously, but it was not a very mirthful laugh.

"I can't face that disgusting moor—I won't look at it—I won't walk on it—I shall go to Mr. Morrison."

"Dear, dear! How wet you are!"

"It's saft; but I'm not wet under this cloak." She hung the wet cloak on a peg in the lobby, and walked into her host's den as one sure of a welcome.

"It looks comfy here," she said, "in spite of this perpetual drizzle: the little drops of water going to make a mighty ocean, I suppose. I'll water this plant with their initial attempt."

She took off the limp felt hat (these rough clothes were of a soft grey colour), and she shook a tiny pool from the brim into a flower-pot.

"I see nothing but symbols to-day," she said. "I'm seeing them everywhere. I ought perhaps to mention that we had lobster-patties for dinner last night. This end to the aspiration of the raindrops is symbolic of most people's attempts at big things; now, isn't it?"

"How is Elizabeth?" he asked, smiling.

"Elizabeth is in perfect health, and really rather sweet. She contemplates so much that one day she ought to be an interesting companion; but, in the meantime—in the meantime——!" She shrugged her shoulders, leaving the sentence unfinished, and went and stood before the big oak bookcase. "Dear! what lovely bindings these books have! How much more life and variety than in all the calf and tree bindings at the Castle: these books are friendly enough to keep one company."

"Are you feeling very dull?"

"Desperate," she said—"absolutely desperate. I feel *so* dull to-day that I just can't bear it; there!" She laughed (and winked too) yet the

old man, accustomed to read people's minds, heard a ring approaching misery behind the laugh, and truth in her statement.

"You have been studying philosophy, my dear lady, but I see that you have not yet acquired the philosophic spirit; when you acquire the philosophic spirit you lose the sense both of flurry and depression."

He spoke lightly, not wishing to appear to take her too seriously.

"And of disillusionment?" she questioned. "It does not do to peep behind the scenes, unless one can rise above disillusionment. For instance, I've heard that this good gentleman"—she pointed on the back of a volume to the name of a philosophic writer—"this good gentleman would be upset for a whole morning if the kidneys were not to his liking."

"Bless me! They should not have given him kidneys."

"Quite," laughed Sybil, "they should not. They should have quoted, 'but of the kidneys and of the fat which is about the kidneys thou shalt not eat.' Who, I wonder, was the Biblical egotist with a passion for kidney who found it expedient to make that law? No

doubt laws are generally framed for the greater good of the greatest number, and the selfish ones get eliminated, as we are told. Nevertheless, Expediency"—she spoke the word slowly, as though struck by it—"Expediency, of course, lies at the root of all law."

"Of all human law," he said.

Sybil was thinking, her grey eyes were fixed upon Mr. Morrison, yet she scarcely saw him.

"Surely all law is human," she said at last. "I only remember one Divine law, and it has nothing to do with those labelled 'this is the law and the prophets.' One feels that the prophets were a big 'and.' They were holy men filled with wisdom, but"—she broke off suddenly—"you don't think that I am being irreverent?" she asked anxiously.

"I am quite sure you are not that," he said, "but I am wondering what is at the back of your mind."

Sybil winced inwardly under the searching gaze of those dark eyes and lied—or began to do so.

"Nothing is at the back of my mind; my ideas are purely speculative," she said; then

added rapidly, "I don't know what made me say that; it isn't true. Something is at the back of my mind, and has set me wondering—speculating. . . . Fräulein Brentmann—you met her—the estimable lady responsible for my upbringing, would say—has said a thousand times—'Righd ees righd, ŭnd wrong ees wrong! no dwo ways aboud eed.'" Sybil imitated the German accent; when quoting Fräulein Brentmann speaking English she all her life had imitated her accent. She did it now unconsciously, and quite solemnly. "What puzzles me is whether that is true. If there were a fundamental right and a fundamental wrong, of course it would be true. But—is there?"

He passed his hand through his hair—a trick he had.

"It is no longer wrong to eat kidney," she suggested.

Still he made no immediate answer, and she slipped into a chair, and, turning a bit of peat with the tongs, watched the sparks fly upwards.

"You are opening up an immense and most intricate question, I see," he said at last. "Man undoubtedly evolves spiritually as well

as mentally; and the manifestations of God—of Goodness—do not change, but they widen with his evolution; as he is able to perceive more. All that is obvious. I am perhaps more inclined to your view, than to that of Fräulein Brentmann when the terms 'right' or 'wrong' are applied to what one should or should not do. Nevertheless, hers is an excellent workaday theory; it is best for most of us to acquiesce to the generally accepted rules of conduct, and certainly to keep the laws of the land we live in."

"Oh! the laws of the land we live in," echoed Sybil; "why, of course!"

She wanted to look at Mr. Morrison but refrained, in order that he should not have the chance to look at her. She was trying to decide whether that was a remark which obviously arose out of their conversation, or whether it argued, on his side, too full an understanding of what was passing in her mind.

"I feel," Sybil said suddenly, "the most extraordinary desire to go away from this place for a time, to teach myself things, and to be, if possible, of some use to other people."

The desire to leave Droon, though intense, was the product of that moment, but he did not guess that. She crossed her knees, folded her hands round them, and her large grey eyes grew dark and eager. If she could but be in London, near to Æneas! Even though she were never to see him:—if she could but be near! This was a great idea.

Mr. Morrison noticed the eagerness, the wistful look of the girl. He, as a matter of fact, knew nothing of Æneas; was scarcely aware of his existence, and absolutely ignorant of his circumstances; so that he could not follow the workings of Sybil's mind, but her restlessness was easy to account for. She was young, active, healthy, and life at Droon was unnaturally quiet. The first year of her widowhood had passed, and now she was anxious for a fuller life; it was very natural.

"You would take a house in some town, I suppose," he said—"in Edinburgh or in London, and see more of your friends? or are you longing to be off abroad again?"

Sybil appeared to be recalled from dreamland.

"I don't mean anything like that at all," she answered.

"No?"

That was one virtue of this dear old gentleman; he never hurried people; he never said such things as, "Then what do you mean?" His "No" held no surprise. He just waited—and Sybil waited too—evolving thoughts. In two or three minutes she spoke.

"I believe I should rather like to go and live in a settlement, and work amongst poor women—poor people; or I might take a little house myself, and work; but I think the settlement would probably be best."

"And Elizabeth?" he questioned.

"Yes, I should hate to leave Elizabeth; if I had a little house she could perhaps come with me. I could not leave her really. I should so miss her; but if I were to go for—say—a few weeks, now is the time. I mean as she grows older it would be more difficult to hand her over to servants, but at one year old she is all right with them; and Nanny is splendidly capable, and Robina would be here. I don't know yet—I hadn't really thought out what would happen about anything. I only just feel that I *must* get away."

He smiled. "But you have never tried such a life as you speak of. I wonder greatly whether you have any idea of what it would mean to you."

"I don't suppose I have," Sybil answered simply. "I've never been in a slum in my life, nor in the house of any poor person in a town: I'm entirely a front-stair individual—and that is abominable. I often think of it—of all we women who never look through the side-doors, who never come up the back-stairs, who lead such astoundingly narrow little un-understanding existences, in a teeny-tiny corner of the world; so direfully restricted: yet we call it living! At least I know enough to feel that is not living."

Mr. Morrison again passed his thin, nervous hand through his hair, and looked keenly at Sybil, greatly wondering. She was not at all herself. What had called forth all this discontent?

"If I were you," he said, "I think I should stay meantime in my own home. It takes all sorts to make a world, you recollect—and the stay-at-home, quiet, peaceful element is an essential one: a haven envied by the storm-

tossed. When the good God has given you a happy and a peaceful home, why not evolve in the natural directions?" He smiled at her. "Yours surely are the pleasant places; why seek the rough-and-tumble?"

Sybil rose from her chair; Mr. Morrison rose, too—his dark eyes were upon her, and filled with anxiety—so strange was the look upon her face; and her voice, steady and low, drawled less than usual, and suggested . . . well he could not define what it suggested . . . beyond a passionate intensity of feeling.

"I'm sure you are a friend," she said. "I've only just thought of all that about the settlement, but it's a good idea. Find out about settlements and places of that kind for me, will you; without mentioning my name? I don't mind telling you my lot is not in pleasant places." She looked straight in his eyes. "These are not pleasant places," she repeated. "My soul is on fire. . . . I must—I must work."

CHAPTER XVIII

So both Æneas and Sybil were thrust back upon the old established antidote to misery—Work.

Æneas determined to make a struggle—to do his duty, as he conceived it. He would endeavour to keep away—not to see Sybil again; to transact any necessary business through his co-trustee. It looked as though nothing but pain could result from their meeting, and he had no right to inflict pain upon her, whatever he might choose for himself. He would work; he would hurl himself upon his profession; he would not allow himself one moment for thought—work—work—work.

Sybil's resolves were less heroic, but she reached the same conclusion. She likewise saw that there must be no time for thought—she must be up and doing—up, and incessantly doing. She did not feel clear, on

further consideration, that her notion of going to a woman's settlement was a good one; she mistrusted her power of working on other people's lines, living in other people's ways; and Mr. Morrison urged her not to part from Robina Frazer. Finally she decided to take a trip to London, visit different parts of it, and see where and how she best might live and work. She carried out her plan promptly —arrived upon a Saturday night and drove to Claridge's Hotel. During the following week she spent long days wandering about parts more foreign to her than any foreign town, and discovering that the sumptuous corner which she had been wont to describe as London was not London at all; merely an oasis in a great mass—not representative of the mass—but containing the homes of a certain comparatively small class; the shops, restaurants, and theatres which this class frequent. The West End no more represented London than the humdrum existence—led, for instance, by Fräulein Brentmann—represented life; not nearly so adequately indeed—for a humdrum existence typifies the life of huge masses of people.

Now she was beginning to realize the immensity of the town: what it held. She saw misery such as she had never dreamed of; she saw plenty of jollity too: much bewildering jollity (for it seemed unbelievable that people should be so jolly in the midst of all that squalor); and she saw row upon row, mile upon mile, of dreary sameness: little grey houses in grey streets—all dreary and drab and colourless—where hard-working men and women drudged through their lives; each day exactly like the last—no respite from work; nothing to hope for this side of the grave. The thought of those men and women choked her: wherever she went—into whatever quarter—they abounded—those dreary streets and the dreary hard-working people, who were somewhat unapproachable; different, altogether, from their reckless, squalid neighbours. They abounded—and always had abounded: yet she had lived so many (twenty-two!) years of her life without realizing them!

One afternoon a nurse came walking down one of these dull streets—her long cloak blown out by the wind behind her — her footsteps firm, and very quick, as though she

had no time to waste. Sybil, watching her, felt that she must cease to be a spectator—a prospector—felt that she must buckle-to instantly: so much to do lay very close at hand. See how that nurse hurried! Words she had read somewhere had been haunting her mind all the day: "Oh! square thyself for use, a stone that may fit in the wall is left not in the way."

She rushed across the road and overtook the nurse—a little woman whose head barely reached to Sybil's shoulder: a little woman with a round and homely but keen face.

"How busy you look! I do envy you! Can't you suggest something for me to do!" she burst forth. The other appeared astonished—a trifle disapproving, too. It was easy to gauge Sybil's status in life, for all her plain clothes; and the nurse, who lived in their lives, disliked Society seeking sensation from the misfortunes of the poor. . . . There was a pause. Sybil added, "I would just give anything to help."

Her soft voice was convincing—her face and eyes beseeching, and the glance towards their surroundings eloquent of the despair these

caused her: her beauty was eloquent, too; so the nurse melted.

"Someone is very ill. I am hurrying to a dispensary to get a mixture made up. Would you like to walk with me?"

Sybil agreed in gladness. It was good to move briskly forward—to have a definite aim in view, after the days of itinerant wanderings through many different districts.

"If you really want to work here you should go to see the Vicar," said the nurse; "don't you think so yourself?"

"Yes perhaps: only I don't know whether this is the place for me. I have not decided yet where I want to live, nor what precisely I want to do. Meantime, is there no one I could help a little, for whom one could perhaps do some little thing, amongst those who live in all these dismal houses?"

The nurse stopped.

"It occurs to me," she said, "there *is* a very sad woman here in this house;—this one. Would you like to go in and see her? She is bed-ridden, poor thing! and it seems to make a world of difference if anyone will go and sit with her."

"I should like to very much. I'm so glad to go."

Casting a further swift glance at the stranger, and convinced of her genuineness, the nurse nodded. "I must hurry on," she said. "The woman's name is Howland. She lives on the third-floor. Tell her I told you. Good-afternoon."

So, then, more than one family occupied each of these dull little houses! Sybil approached the door and saw three rusty bells one below the other, and wondered whether the top one or the bottom one represented the third-floor. She rang the bottom one: nobody came. She rang the top one; nobody came; so, finally, she knocked on the door with the rusty knocker. When it was opened an appalling atmosphere of stuffiness greeted her—just *stuffiness;* and a big, hard-looking woman stood before her.

"What do you want?" asked the hard-looking woman.

"I called to see Mrs. Howland," said Sybil.

"Third-floor back," said the woman, pointing towards the stairs, and eyeing the visitor with an air of great mistrust. "An' if you want third-floor another time knock three

times. I got something else to do than open the door for Mrs. 'owland." She slammed it, and vanished.

It was extraordinarily dark in the house, and the smell—now Sybil was fairly inside and the door closed—made her feel sick. She groped up the stair till she reached the third-landing, and then feeling her way—rather than seeing it—tapped at the door of "third floor back."

"Come in," said a voice. She turned the handle, not without trepidation. The door opened inwards towards the bed, and the voice came from the bed.

"Is that you, nurse?" it said; a thin, fibreless, slightly querulous voice, but startling—for the speaker was clearly a person of some refinement, unlike the big woman downstairs.

"It is not the nurse," answered Sybil; "but may I come in? She sent me; she thought possibly you might like to see me."

"Pray come in. I'm thankful enough to see anyone," said the voice.

It was a little room, stuffy too, but not so abominably stuffy as the staircase; and on a plain iron bedstead in the corner, lay a plain

thin woman, the colour gone from every part of her: from lips, cheeks, hair and eyes, alike: her hands upon the sheets were as the claws of an animal—distorted and mis-shapen.

She turned her faded eyes upon Sybil and seemed to devour her with them. Then she tried to raise herself in bed.

"I'm a martyr to rheumatism, madam. You see, it has crippled me absolutely. So very good of you to visit me. I——" Another futile effort to rise.

"Oh," Sybil interposed, "if you disturb yourself in that manner, Mrs. Howland, I must go away. You are *not* to make company of me, please."

She spoke kindly—went up to the bed and laid her hand upon the nearest poor claw. A flood of colour rushed over the cripple's face.

"It is years—ten years," she said—"since I saw anyone like you, madam. . . . I had a business once—a good dressmaker's business in the West End; but—but one thing and another—this illness came on me, and my husband left me—and one way and another I lost everything. Well, I just have enough left to live like this, you see. Hard, isn't it? Ten

years I've been in bed; and the district visitor, the only time I let her in, said I ought to be 'thankful for my blessings!'"

"Oh dear!" said Sybil.

"The nurse is very kind to me; but that uniform, of course, having seen it once, one knows it, madam. To the artist's eye, if I may say so, it conveys but little. Now, pardon me, your costume is a pleasure."

"Oh dear!" gasped Sybil again. It was all very different from anything she had anticipated. She had the plainest black coat and skirt, the simplest of toques. She had taken, as she thought, such care that her clothes should not attract attention.

"It's the cut, of course," said Mrs. Howland. "One can see at once that came from a first-rate house. The quality of the serge, too. Excuse me, madam, might I just feel it?"

She gripped hold of the coat. She was carried quite outside herself. Those terrible clawlike hands fingered the material greedily; the pale eyes had animation in them; a bright red spot had appeared on each cheek. "Such an exquisite lining," she murmured.

Clothes! How awful! was Sybil's first

thought. Ten years of misery—of this dreariness—and clothes still the great preoccupation! Surely that was shocking! Then she recollected hearing Mr. Morrison say, more than once, that well-intentioned persons with philanthropic aspirations often fail because they insist on giving what they wish to give, and withhold what the needy wish to receive.

She would try not to fail in that way.

"I am glad you like my dress," she said smiling. "I thought myself how uncommonly nice that satin lining was. Would you like me to tell you all about the new fashions?"

After a time, with Sybil's help, she raised herself a little bit against her pillow; and the window was opened, to let in the soft summer air and to let out the stuffiness. Chatting and talking of her business experience—clothes, and the names of her customers—Mrs. Howland fell a complete victim to her visitor, and actually allowed her to sweep a little—with an old broom which stood in the corner—and to dust the room.

About eight o'clock the door opened, and a tired-looking, white-faced woman walked in, and started when she saw Sybil.

"This is my neighbour," Mrs. Howland remarked; "and most kind to me."

"I'll come in a bit later," said the neighbour.

To Sybil she looked neither kind nor unkind; just dulled, like a bit of machinery.

"She covers buttons all day," Mrs. Howland explained. "She looks me up so soon as she gets back, and before she goes in the morning. Very kind, indeed; but, of course, not as though she were here all the time."

When at last Sybil prepared to go it was dark—past eight o'clock—and Mrs. Howland thanked her, and—

"Might I ask your name?" she said.

Sybil hesitated a second, then, quickly inventing a pseudonym, answered that it was Sophie Masterton, for she feared that, in her own person, she would not be allowed to sweep the room.

"I have not been so happy for fifteen years," was Mrs. Howland's final remark.

They had talked, as it seemed, such nonsense; in such direful circumstances! Yet Mr. Morrison was perfectly right. That was the way. Mrs. Howland had what she liked most.

"I will look in again to-morrow and bring

you some fashion-books. Sleep well," said Sybil, and went away, cheered herself; so that the stuffiness of the passage and staircase, though undiminished, was no longer entirely revolting.

It was a dull night, and the grey street most inadequately lighted; but, passing out of it and round a corner, Sybil soon found herself in a bright enough place; in an open-air market, where were great flaring gas-jets. At the end of the market street was a main thoroughfare, whence County Council trams would doubtless take her Westwards.

Going through the market street she attracted more attention than she cared for. Many of the people spoke as though they had heavy colds in their heads, and someone chaffed her—though always good-naturedly—every now and again.

It was a Friday, and the street was very full. Everything smelt horrible — that was the worst of it. Near to a fried-fish shop, with a permeating odour, there was a darling baby—she supposed not more than two and a half years old—in a torn frock of bright red cotton, with a mop of absolutely yellow curls. He was catching lumps of fish in his

little hands—thrown to him by the shopman—and so eating them!

Sybil stood still and watched him, and thought of Elizabeth: Elizabeth, a year and a half younger—at the very most two years younger; Elizabeth with a couple of women in constant attendance upon her own personal wants! Elizabeth in the peace and fresh air of Droon!

"Who is that lovely little boy?"

She walked into the shop, and questioned the man who was flinging the fish.

"I'm sure I dunno," he said, rather roughly. "'E comes 'ere ev'ry evenin'." He looked more particularly at Sybil, and added with greater civility: "Don't seem a bad kid."

"Where is your mother, dear?" Sybil inquired, stooping to this seraphic-looking infant. What the seraphic infant answered cannot be chronicled. She saw the shop-assistant turn away — she heard him suppress a gurgling laugh. There was another laugh behind her shoulder—a woman's laugh—and a dreadful voice said, "That serves yer right, askin' people impertinent questions."

Sybil turned in indignation and disgust, and

looked at the speaker. She was a big, coarse woman of the Jewish type, dressed in black, greasy and astoundingly repulsive; but with her was another and much younger person, who looked like a lady, who was elegant in spite of being somewhat shabby; full upon Sybil this younger woman's face was turned, and it was frightened, and drawn, and wistful. Her rough companion put an arm through hers and drew her away, but she kept the wistful face over her shoulder, and still looked at Sybil. Who and what was she?—a kindred soul in trouble? That personality and these surroundings were entirely incongruous.

But now a host of people had intercepted them; the two women were lost in the crowd. Sybil began to feel alarmed, and looked to left and right of her for a moment, helplessly. There seemed to be so few police about in these parts of the town; she had not seen one all the afternoon. People in these parts presumably did not need so much protection, and property was perhaps not so valuable.

The crowd thickened on the road and on the pavement; the buyers stood haggling over prices, and examining the goods on the

stalls. It was something like an Eastern bazaar—a sordid version of an Eastern bazaar. She tried to hurry, but it was not easy.

Slipping her way in behind three sailors walking arm in arm, Sybil tried to take advantage of the space they had cleared for themselves, but that only helped for a moment or two. Suddenly she caught sight of the burly form of a policeman, just ahead of her.

"Do the trams for the Embankment run to the right or to the left when I get out of this street?" she asked.

"Trams for the Embankment! There are no trams for the Embankment from here," he said.

"Oh!" said Sybil. "I came here in a taxi-cab; but I thought there seemed to be trams for the Embankment from everywhere."

The policeman surveyed her.

"If you follow me, lady," he said, "I'll show you a motor-bus would run you up to Aldgate. You could take the train from there. That would be your quickest plan."

Sybil followed, relieved at his presence. She began to be conscious of physical fatigue

—the fact that she was late for dinner, and had had no tea. They reached the main thoroughfare, and there was a public-house near the corner. Just outside it stood the two women who had stopped beside the fish-shop — the coarse, rude woman, and the woman with the wistful face. With them were one or two men, who looked like foreigners.

"Policeman," said Sybil, "do you see those two women?"

"Yes," he said, "I see them."

"Well, what do you think of them?"

He was surprised, and took a side glance at Sybil. What, for example, was she doing down here all alone, at this time of the evening? And she appeared to be distressed, judging from the expression of her face.

"Very low-class women, lady," he said, after clearing his throat. "The old fat one is well known in Whitechapel—the worst type of her class. The other is a stranger to me."

"That's the one who interests me," said Sybil.

The party were moving into the public-house; the men went first, then the fat, coarse

woman, who let the door slam after herself. The other woman had one hand on the glass of the panel, when Sybil rushed up to her.

"Don't go in there—come with me!" she said impulsively. "Don't go in there!"

There was a wonderful stillness, even in the midst of the confusion and turmoil of traffic which surrounded them. The two young women looked into each other's eyes; then the door swung open, and the Jewess appeared.

"'Ere," she said, "why don't yer foller?" Come along, deer."

She saw Sybil, and a torrent of abuse was just beginning, when she also saw the constable. Both women vanished, and the door swung to.

"That is appalling!" Sybil said with conviction, and repeated it; clasping her hands; "that is appalling!"

"Yes, there *is* something funny there," the constable assented; "the one you spoke to has seen better days. She don't belong here at all, or I'm much mistaken. Drink probably," he added laconically.

"I shall come here again to-morrow, I think. Is this your beat?"

"After eight," he said, "for this week. Here comes your 'bus, lady."

She pressed a sovereign into his hand.

"Policeman, do me a kindness," she said. "Watch that young woman; find out about her if you can."

CHAPTER XIX

When, in the earlier part of the year, Lord Monteith had visited his son in his London chambers, and the latter said that he had not much time for Society with a big "S," he intended to convey—and did convey, to his father—that society of another kind had some claim upon him. Æneas was not a moralist; he held the views of the majority of men upon such subjects. But after the disaster of his marriage, and the unhappiness it brought upon him, he came to London in no mood to seek adventures, had one not, so to speak, sought him.

He began his work in September, and it was towards the end of the following October that there flitted across his path a little lady whom he dubbed the "Butterfly." She was not what is considered a respectable little lady, and when Æneas made her acquaintance she

was in rather low water; her "friend" had gone abroad with his regiment, and she had speculated with, and lost, the money which he gave her to "run the show" for a while.

She and Æneas dined together and went to the play. She was very pretty, and she cast her anxieties to the wind, and was gay and careless. She fitted in precisely with his somewhat reckless mood; a few more meetings and the Butterfly had started another ménage, in Chelsea this time, and paid for by our friend.

She was the daughter of an Irish naval officer, by a French mother, so her parentage endowed her with many of the qualities which go to make an entertaining companion. Indeed, she was a real fascinater, bright, light, and fitful—as indicated by her name—and the little ménage was a vast success. Yet its duration was remarkably short.

In about four months' time Æneas felt that some disturbing element had got to work, and was therefore not unprepared for the débâcle, which came before Easter, although he was a trifle disappointed. The little lady terminated the arrangement in quite an exhausting scene,

through which she mingled tears and fervent protestations of affection with a large modicum of worldly wisdom. A very, *very* rich stockbroker had taken a fancy to her—oh! very, *very* rich—five or six thousand a year . . . unmarried, and might marry her—no property or anything to swallow up the money. "D-d-darling," she sobbed, "it's so *awful!* yet one must think of these things."

Æneas gave her a handsome cheque when they parted, and it was with a real tenderness that he said, "Little Butterfly, I hope he'll be good to you. Remember I should help you if things were to go wrong. You will only have to ask me."

She knew him as Alick Gray, and he handed her an address whence letters to that name would reach him.

The stockbroker was of quite another class from that to which the little lady's "friends" had, up to now, belonged. But Æneas had made inquiries and learned that he was not a bad fellow—richer even than she imagined, and quite likely to marry her. She had, one would have thought, been wise in her decision, yet it all went most unhappily.

The stockbroker did marry her. He had a tender conscience for detail, and the Butterfly was sent to spend Easter in Dieppe—where his family knew that he was spending Easter —in order that, on his return, he might say that he had met her there. The idea of such a ruse amused her most intensely, but she went, returned in triumph, and was introduced to the broker's excellent family, living in Lancaster Gate, "as the daughter of a naval officer, whom I met in Dieppe."

She was on her very best behaviour, and the family found her charming. True, they wished they could have known a little more about her "people," but she appeared to have none. They talked much of her "French finish," her rather "French" little ways—"so delightful." And the broker became more and more enamoured. They were married within six weeks.

She had foolishly imagined to herself that the stress and strain would then end—the good old times of frivol and jollity come once more. She was altogether wrong: her broker guarded her as a cat guards a mouse: he did not like frivolity in a wife; what was suitable in a

young girl was quite unsuitable in a married woman.

"And how much older am I for being married? And how much different? Don't be such a fool!" stormed the Butterfly; but he was shocked and adamant.

After their brief honeymoon things went from bad to worse at lightning speed—absolutely at lightning speed. The house he had bought was not ready for them; why, he asked, should they needlessly waste money, by taking a flat or staying in an hotel, when there was room and to spare in his widowed mother's house, and it would console her to have him there for a bit longer. The poor Butterfly expostulated, but found herself dealing with material of which she had no experience.

For all her talk, she made no impression whatever. He treated her much as one treats a naughty child: said that he was very much surprised, and that she must learn to accommodate herself. She listened intently to all his words on that occasion, and especially noticed the slight peculiarity in his vowels—"i's" and "o's" in particular. Then she thought of all

that he represented: if she could only get accustomed to the deadly dulness she need never have a care. She determined that she would really try again—try *very* hard.

Each day she came down to breakfast at half-past eight, and, having listened to her lord and master reading prayers, accompanied him into the hall, and dutifully allowed him to peck her cheek before he started for the city—a rite to which he attached importance.

In the morning she discovered that "one writes one's notes" or "does one's shopping," and reads the newspaper. One lunches at 1.30. One drives at 2.45 until 4.45, during which time one calls on one's acquaintance, or goes to a concert perhaps. One is in by five, about which hour one's husband returns from the city. One has tea, and makes conversation; and after dinner one plays and sings whether one can or not. Sometimes one dines with congenial friends—sometimes the congenial friends return the compliment; and occasionally one goes to the play or to a concert.

The Butterfly stuck to it valiantly for two and a half months, until the beginning of July.

She made an honest endeavour, and the disappointment at her failure was honest too; but this was the limit. To her such a life was unbearable — better die in the gutter than live so; and her remorse at the mistake she had made capped the whole thing. She had never felt remorse before; from any situation which proved uncongenial it had always been possible to shake one's self free; but now—well, even now she must get free somehow. She was very, very unhappy, and she took a little chloral—just a little—to help her to forget about it. By the end of a week or so she increased the dose, and the habit began to grow. Something must be done, she told herself. Everything looked black ahead, but this path, down which she was beginning to step, would be the blackest of all. She knew that, and decided to seek the excitement—without which she could not live—in some other form.

She would leave her broker, and go back to the old life. She felt sorry about him; she knew that—according to his lights—he had treated her well, and she wished she could have repaid him for that; but his price was

altogether too high. She wrote and told him so, and put the letter—with foresight—into his pyjama pocket, hoping thus to prevent his mother getting wind of it, until at least the next day.

She took nothing away which belonged to him—and practically everything belonged to him—so she walked out of the house one afternoon in the clothes she stood up in, with three pound ten in her purse, and a small parcel containing her nightgown, sponge, etc., in her hand. She had her view of honour, this little Butterfly! But, then, what was she to do? and where was she to go?

There was a house in Bloomsbury where she was staying when Æneas first made her acquaintance; the only time in her previous life that she recollected having felt anxiety and uncertainty as to the future. She went there, and secured a room. The landlady was pleased to see her, but the room and her breakfast was to cost four shillings a night; she formerly had considered that remarkably cheap. She entered into an unconvincing rigmarole as to why she had no luggage, and concluded it suddenly by saying: "The truth

of the matter is something has happened. I have no luggage; it is neither booked nor mislaid: I just have no luggage."

"Well, well," said the landlady sapiently, "life 'as its hups *hand* its downs."

"So it has!" agreed the Butterfly, and flopped on to a chair, stretching her feet straight before her, and looking around somewhat quizzically. . . . The rather tawdry, shabby room was a haven of rest after the solid magnificence of Bayswater. The landlady, shabby-fine in her afternoon gown, seemed so comfy and approachable after the solid mysterious nothingness of the ladies of her family-in-law. The Butterfly tapped the ground with her high heels and laughed. She raised her feet a little, and examined the pointed toes of patent leather.

"I've forgotten to bring a button-hook," she said; "shall you be able to lend me one?"

The landlady could not say; the "lidy" below might have one: she herself had not.

"Well, then, I must go out, that settles it," the Butterfly remarked. "I can't sleep in my boots, and I can't button them with my fingers; otherwise I had thought of spending

this evening in 'the sanctity of the home,' and feeding on air. You know about 'the sanctity of the home,' of course?"

"Gow on!" said the landlady cheerily. "I'll fetch yer up a latch-key. Yer can ring the bell sime as yer used when yer want yer breakfast."

"Tea and kipper, tea and sorsage," mimicked the Butterfly. "Sime ole menoo."

"Gow on!" repeated the landlady good-naturedly, and went off herself.

Again the Butterfly rapped the floor with her heels and laughed. Then she rose, walked across to the looking-glass, and straightened her hat. She pulled the gas-jet out towards the glass which was set in the wardrobe door, and looked critically at herself. She had changed; the last few months had changed her amazingly. She peered first at her face, and then tried to get the general effect of herself. She had—yes, she really had—caught something of the style of those people. She shook herself; she shook her shoulders; she seized her skirts and shook them. She did—she did look respectable. "It's these clothes!" she cried. She savagely pushed her hat a trifle to one side,

and fluffed her hair under it with a hairpin. She raised her skirt just to show the flounce of her petticoat, and walked pensively, peering over her shoulder at the effect in the glass; it was not especially good; and now her mood had changed. A sudden lump rose in her throat; she wished to cry, but gulped down the tears. Why cry now, when she had escaped? How silly! She swallowed the lump in her throat, replaced her hat, and rearranged her hair.

> "I will buy a button-hook,
> 'Je me fiche de' how I look,"

she sang with firm determination, and lowering the lights, set out.

It was now past eight o'clock, and she felt rather hungry. She wondered where to dine. They would have missed her in Lancaster Gate, and be thoroughly alarmed by now; they would search for her. She would have to bear that in mind. The Butterfly stood still in her path and considered; this had not occurred to her volatile little mind before. Her broker would search for her; he would have the restaurants watched—the smart

restaurants in the Strand and Regent Street, which she used to frequent. She would be driven back upon another class of restaurant, and who could say how far his investigations might extend? Perhaps the West End would not be safe at all; perhaps they were already looking for her! She shivered, and peeped behind her nervously. But no, that was ridiculous; to-night she would be quite safe in any case. They would not have had time; and he would never think of Bloomsbury. He did not know about the little low-water spell, from which she had been rescued by Æneas; he did not know she had ever lived there. . . . She found a small Italian restaurant, went into it, and dined quietly by herself. It was not an expensive place at all, yet by the time she had dined, and given sixpence to the waiter, another three and sixpence of her money had gone: already ten shillings had been spent of her three pounds ten, and she had left her husband's home but between three and four hours ago. This was alarming.

Two days later she was beginning to order her meal when a tall foreigner — who had watched her previously from a neighbouring

table—approached, and suggested that she should leave that to him; he ordered the dinner with a bottle of champagne, and took her to the Empire. They talked French all the time. They had been in the building about half an hour when she had a hideous shock. A first cousin and great friend of the broker's, a constant frequenter of the Lancaster Gate house, passed by with another man, and seated himself in the stalls, about three rows in front of her. She felt sick with fright and nervousness, and turned absolutely white, which her companion noticed. He behaved very well—took her out, put her in a cab, and respected her request that he would let her go home alone. She thanked him warmly, and they arranged to meet two days hence, and dine at the same place; but then she gave a false address! She gave the address of some mansions not far from where she lodged, and, having disappeared into them—and allowed the cab time to drive away—she walked home; but she was altogether, and in every way, upset and shaken. It was perfectly clear that it was not safe for her to stay in this part of London: any moment she might be seen and

recognized. It was absolute madness. But—where to go?

Another thing, also, was strangely clear to her—she could not stand the kind of life. But—what to do?

When she was in Bayswater she fretted at the dreariness, and longed to be back in her old haunts. Now! . . . She tried to explain it. For one thing these were, of course, *not* her old haunts; the habitués of these places—both men and women—were different altogether. But to frequent the old haunts meant capital, at least in the way of clothes; it meant having plenty of really well-made clothes; and altogether an extraordinary distaste for the life and the places came upon her, and a great nervousness.

She gave the Bloomsbury landlady notice that she would leave next day, and the latter congratulated her.

"Quick business," said she. "'Ope it may be good business, too, I'm sure."

The Butterfly thanked her, and let the matter rest at that; but she walked out of that Bloomsbury house feeling lost and forlorn as she had never done in her whole life. She

could not bear anything. She had had a chance—more than a chance—and she had missed it. She had been a fool. Perhaps she was being a fool now, not to rejoin her original profession, and step down the ladder; but she could not bear that. She thought of suicide, but that too was unbearable. She thought of going abroad, but she had barely money enough left to pay her fare; and she did not know her way about Paris. She was walking aimlessly down the Tottenham Court Road, carrying the little parcel which contained her few belongings: she looked round and fancied she saw her mother-in-law's carriage on the other side of the road in front of Maple's shop. It was not her mother-in-law's carriage; but it served to frighten the Butterfly, and she rapidly jumped into a passing omnibus, which would, the conductor said, take her to Camden Town; to Camden Town therefore she decided to go. Obviously—if she wished not to be found — the West End, or anywhere near the West End, was totally unsafe, but on leaving the bus at Camden Town she discovered that to be an unpromising locality. It had occurred to her as she went

along, that she might get work as a shop-assistant, but the shops here were unpromising. She stood hesitating at a street corner, when someone spoke. "Want to know the way, miss?" said a voice. She turned, and saw that it was a butcher who had spoken to her; —a butcher with a fatherly kind face.

"Are there any drapers' shops—or shops here where I could work as an assistant, I wonder?" she asked.

He was very much surprised; and looked it.

"You work as a shop-assistant! Well, I'm"—he checked himself—"well, I should never 'a thought it," he substituted; "no, I don't think there is any up 'ere would suit you."

He considered for a moment, then he added: "Tell you what, though, 'ave you thought of Islington? Lars' week I 'appened to go there along o' my wife, and we was remarkin' on the 'igh-class shops. . . . I can tell yer not far from the Angel there's a shop as 'ud take some beatin'. *Most* 'igh class—and wonderful smart young lidies to serve yer. That's what I should do; I should try that."

"Is it far?" asked the Butterfly somewhat

faintly; but far or not, her new friend appeared determined that she should go there. She went, and luck was on her side. A new assistant was wanted—smartness was an advertised necessity. The Butterfly was far smarter than anyone who had applied; her figure was beautiful, she had the French finish, and her clothes—well! The manager looked at her clothes! She had gone away in an embroidered blouse of soft French lawn—choosing it because it could be easily washed; it was an exquisitely made little blouse, and the dark blue serge coat and skirt with which she wore it were perfect too, of their kind—they came from Paquin. The coat was braided simply; but with a quality of braid of which the manager, as an expert, gauged the value. She wore a small straw hat to match this costume, with a coloured wing and very smart rosette—a thorough French hat, which—for all she had thought its angle dowdy—sat with a great air on that mass of dark curly hair. And then the Butterfly had a charming little face—irregular and piquante (as was her character), with brilliant colouring, and the wonderful Irish eyes of dark blue which her father had

bequeathed to her. The manager was no simpleton; he quite saw that there was something strange about this applicant.

She told him frankly she had never been in business before; but when she fixed those big blue eyes on his and said with earnestness she would try very hard to learn—and to please—he engaged her; though telling himself he was a fool.

The Butterfly stayed in Islington a month. She was a success and hated to go; but men made life difficult by their attentions, and women made life impossible by their consequent jealousies. She was plucky. She moved on, and hoped for better things—but for a time they seemed not to come.

After she left Islington she at once went back to Camden Town: there had never been a moment in the interval except on a Sunday—and on a Sunday she did not suppose she could find the butcher—yet she wished to thank him for his helpful advice. She went back to Camden Town, and found his shop easily enough; but only a lad was in it—a young fellow of about seventeen. The Butterfly described her friend.

"Right oh!" said the young man, "that's the master" . . . But he was out—would be back in two or three hours' time; could she call then?

In the meanwhile (for she decided at once to return) what was she to do? She walked along the main road farther, turned into a by-street, and on the left she saw a church. Church was not much in the Butterfly's line. In her early days she went to Mass—when she lived in Normandy; since!——well, she had never been really *dévote.* It is impossible to say what made her walk straight into that church which, from the outside, was an uninteresting-looking building—yet she did go. Lamps burned round the altar, and there was an atmosphere in the building to which this woman—with all her shortcomings—was immediately sensitive. There was an atmosphere of worship: here there was no deadness, but warmth and life. Instinctively she sank upon her knees and crossed herself.

Behind the pulpit she at once noticed a large crucifix, and a slanting ray from the afternoon sun fell upon it, and illumined it. A surging sense of impotence—of loneliness—swept over

her. She stretched out her arms and bowed her head.

"Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.
Asperges me, Domine, hyssopo, et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor."

The sprinkling of the Holy Water—this phrase from the High Mass—had fixed itself on her imagination in childhood's days, and came back naturally enough now. Yet childhood began to feel so very far away! Those days in the farmhouse in Normandy, where her mother had placed her—where she had lived until, when she was sixteen, a gentleman came to the farm to paint. She had never regretted having adopted the life she did; it was her mother's life—she knew that, and it never appeared to her to be regrettable: but of late she had had doubts. Ever since she left Lancaster Gate she had, in fact, had doubts. A deeper side of her nature was awakening. The Butterfly had lived from day to day as her kind live. Through these black days she still had lived from one moment to the other—just as she used to do when all was sunny. It was not in her nature to look ahead; but now,

for some reason, she did it. As she rose from her knees and walked down the aisle, she looked into the future; and solemn thoughts filled her mind. She would have liked to "be good," but if she altered her life entirely—and for altogether—would existence be possible? What could she do? The thought of returning to the home she had left, never so much as crossed her mind. Her face hardened. To live working—always working—to live as she had lived at Islington: oh, awful! Impossible! Whereas the other life was simple, and gay, and luxurious, and, in her experience, had always been happy; before very long, perhaps, she could live it once again. Ah! what a comfort! She glanced across the roadway and smiled, and then—in a flash—once more she saw the shaft of sunshine. The Figure upon which it fell came before her mind, and her face grew hard: "Not for me," she muttered; "it cannot be for me. My path is chosen; how can I turn?"

The days that followed were disheartening, miserable days. One thing after another went wrong. She walked from shop to shop, from place to place; but no one wanted her, and

many were rude; and again her little store of money was running low. It was now August, and the days were hot and stuffy, but if she could hold on till about the tenth, her—yes, he actually was her husband (the idea was funny and made her smile)—her husband would have taken his family to Switzerland: surely she might then safely venture to show herself in the West End! . . . She must somehow struggle on till then—four days more—ninety-six hours more!

There was no air in the streets; she felt limp and ill, and was losing her looks and her smartness. She seemed to have exhausted the North of London, and began to drift Eastwards. Two days later she went into another church, hoping to find comfort and perhaps help; but she found nothing there—no feeling of anything—no life, no lights; no quiet even; for a charwoman was swishing water and scrubbing, and made a continual clanging sound with the handle of her tin pail. The Butterfly came out more disheartened still. Then a woman walked up to her—a miserable, starved-looking woman. She carried a baby in her arms, and two others trailed beside her.

"Lidy," she said, "'elp me. I dunno what to do. Look at 'em. I carn't sell a blessed one o' my matches to-dy, and their father's met with a accident. 'E's in the 'orspital; and I do *'ate* to see 'em starve."

The Butterfly halted; a film covered her eyes.

"Poor thing!" she said, and opened her purse. One pound ten shillings and two pennies remained. . . . She handed over the pound and hurried away.

The story wasn't true. The beggar was richer than the giver; yet the giver was the richer for the gift, though so very little remained. She spent that night in Whitechapel—in a lodging-house close to the Commercial Road; but the surroundings terrified her, so she never went to bed, but sat all night upon a chair in a state of nerves and misery. Early the next morning she left, walking off she knew not whither—ahead of her; anywhere.

She began to be amazed at herself.

Why was she doing this—enduring these things? Why not write to someone—someone she had known before, who would help her? There was Æneas. She was supposed to know him as Alick Grey. She did so know

him, and think of him; but a chance had revealed his identity. She was aware that he was really Æneas Monteith, and had chambers in the Temple, in Fountain Court: she knew it quite well. Then why not write to him? He had told her to do so; he would help her—she would write.... Even in these parts one could find a post-office in the main streets. She found the post-office, and bought a letter-card.

"DEAR ALICK (she wrote),

"You said you would help me if I were in difficulties. I am: and shall be thankful if you will keep your promise. Forgive me that I know your name—I knew it almost from the first—and write to you direct, because I cannot wait. I will come at 9.30 to-morrow night. Please see me. I only pray you are not gone out of London.

"YOUR BUTTERFLY (bedraggled)."

She posted it.

Close by she saw a chemist's shop—a horrid-looking place, certainly, but perhaps one could buy something there to make one forget. Anyway, she could but try. Sleeping tablets, perhaps. She stood hesitating.

No; that would not do. Sleeping tablets would not do; it would never do to go to sleep down here. Again the demon of fright possessed her. She hurried on through Stepney; straight on—with a white, frightened face, as one pursued. She hurried on till the sight of a crowd stopped her. Something had happened. There were police; people were running and shouting; it was a fight, she heard someone say. She crossed the road and got into a little side street, and ran too—ran as fast as she could go for a minute or more. After that she walked for a bit, then ran again. She turned—now this way, now that—through a labyrinth of small streets, each more or less like the other, and most of them deserted, except for a few dirty children or hawkers; and the children and the hawkers shouted at her. For five minutes or so she kept up this intermittent running, and then she suddenly realized that she was absolutely and completely lost; and the part she was getting into appeared to be lived in by a lower class than the part she had come through. The surroundings were more squalid, the smell worse—and what was that space ahead there? Again she began

to try to run, as a tired, lost dog runs—bewildered, frightened; looking to left and right. She could not hope to escape attention, and many more people were about.

"Now then," said a gruff voice. "What's this? 'Oo are you? What's your little game?" A brutal-looking man stood before her—the sort of creature whose picture she had seen in illustrated papers: a man with cruel eyes and an underhung jaw, a muffler, and a cloth cap. She stopped and shrank back. In one second he had the little bag which contained her purse, and the small strapped parcel with her belongings; and he had gone. It was just at that moment she saw upon the other side of the road a big, fat, common-looking woman, who, however, wore a bonnet, and appeared better off than anyone she had seen since she left the main thoroughfare. The Butterfly crossed and spoke to her. She felt somehow not more frightened but less frightened, since the man had stolen her purse. She was walking through a nightmare, chilled and spectre-like; she was no longer a living woman.

"Can you tell me where I am?" said the Butterfly. "I have lost my way."

"You are by the Docks," the woman answered, and surveyed her questioner with her small, twinkling black eyes from top to toe. Here, certainly, was something unusual. "Which wy might you wish to gow?"

She was a Cockney Jewess—the Butterfly knew that at once by the way she spoke—however, she had no prejudice against Jews.

"I should like to get away from here," she said. "Someone has just stolen my purse, and the parcel I had with me."

"Very loikely," said the other. "I should git awy from 'ere if I was you. But which wy did you wish to gow?"

"I want to go where there are shops—at least, I did want to go where there were shops, but——"

The street began to heave up and down, and she heard a voice in the far, far distance say, "Lean aginst me, deer."

When she came to herself again she was sitting in the roadway—in that horrible dirty roadway — leaning against a lamp-post. A dozen or so dirty people and children were surrounding her; the woman with the black

dress and the black eyes was peering into her face, and something like fire was trickling down her throat.

"I'm so sorry," murmured the Butterfly. "I'm all right again now. She rose to her feet.

"I've fixed all up nicely for you," said the woman in black. "Come and 'ave a bit o dinner. You may a' lorst *your* purse, but I 'aven't lorst mine."

"How good you are!" said the Butterfly weakly.

They were very soon in an eating-house; the food was appalling, but she ate some of it, closing her eyes and trying not to think; and she swallowed more of the fiery spirits.

"So you were lookin' for shops," said the Jewess conversationally. "Naow, close where I live, raound 'Ounsditch and Whitechapel, we got fine shops. You should gow and see those."

"Should I get work there, do you suppose?" said the Butterfly.

"Work?" said the Jewess, clasping her much bejewelled hands upon the dirty table-cloth, and leaning over it as she peered closer into the Butterfly's face; "work?" said she.

"Now, if it's *work* you want, why not join my li'l business. I got a very smart li'l business, and I'm out abaout another assistant this mornin'."

"What kind of a business is it?" asked the Butterfly.

"It's a dressmikin' business."

"Oh!" said the Butterfly, "I'm afraid I have no training. I should be no use to you; but I have been a shop-assistant."

"Then I could mike you sileswoman in my business."

The two women looked hard at one another. Neither believed the other.

"Might I come and see your shop, and see what the work would be?"

"This is early clòsin' dy," said the Jewess. "To-morrer I could show you it. To-dy my young lidies is not at work — that's to sy, would 'ave left business before we got there. To-morrer you could see it. Now, suppose you spend to-dy with me—that's my proposal —and see the business to-morrer. I've got a snug li'l room in my private 'ouse; I can put you up, and to-morrer you could see it. I feel sure some'ow we should suit one another."

"I have no money," said the Butterfly, "since that man took my purse."

"What's that?" said the other. "Or, if you're so pertickler, I'll tike to-dy's board off your first week's wige, and I'll risk your not tiking the billet; for my li'l business—that's a li'l bit o' orl-right."

The Butterfly was silent—trying to think—but the tremendously strong spirits had confused her mind a little; she could not feel clear about things. She only knew that it was less awful to be with someone, even to be with this sly and greasy-looking woman, than to be quite—quite alone; and if she could get through this one day, then to-morrow—what was it, again, about to-morrow? She could not recollect; but there was something. Ah yes! she had written to Alick—Alick would give her money to-morrow. She took another drink of the strong spirit—partly to toast the coming day: to-morrow! partly to get more courage for the moment—and she looked towards the Jewess.

"It is very kind of you. I shall be very glad to come," she said politely, and she saw and noted the swift look which crossed the

other's face. So might a wolf look, as the lamb walks guilelessly towards it.

In spite of everything the Butterfly gave a little laugh of sheer amusement.

"For this lamb is not guileless," she was thinking.

CHAPTER XX

It was past ten o'clock when Sybil, having taken the policeman's advice and got into the Underground at Aldgate, left it at Charing Cross. In spite of her fatigue, or possibly because of it, she felt restless, and decided that she would walk back to Brook Street. She thought of the girl whom she saw disappear into that public-house; she visualized her, and the picture made her shiver. How airy, and sumptuous, and beautiful Trafalgar Square was! How different from the places she had just left! She stood still and enjoyed it for one minute. Then a clock struck the half-hour. How late, to be sure! and recollecting that Robina would be worrying, she gave up her walk, hailed a passing cab, and drove back to Claridge's. Robina was waiting and anxious; just as Sybil had feared. A bath was prepared; a dainty tea-gown and slippers all ready, and

dinner laid in her own sitting-room—where, as a rule, she never had any meals. Robina had considered all contingencies; it was so late, her lady would be too tired to go down; and if she should already have dined, why, the table could be cleared in a minute! delicious flowers were about the room; the shaded lights were soft and restful. But the sight of so much luxury caused Sybil to shudder, and cover her face with her hands. She could scarcely bear to look at it, whilst the remembrance of the other woman was so strong in her mind; whilst visions of Mrs. Howland, and of the poor tired woman who covered buttons all day long, still haunted her.

"I suppose you haven't had your dinner, m'ledy?"

"No; but really I don't think I want any."

"When did you have your tea?"

"I—I don't think I had any tea."

"You don't think you had any tea! Oh! it's just awful nonsense, this; I've no patience with it." Robina put her finger on the bell, and rang with decision, whilst Sybil walked into her bedroom, which was adjoining. Robina's indignation was amusing anyhow.

"Tell them to clear that table," she said, as she passed from one room to the other, and then she watched the effect of her words. The indignant Mrs. Frazer paid no heed whatsoever, and Sybil—who had not expected that she would — laughed as she overheard the carrying out of her orders.

"Herr ledyship," said Robina with her best Scotch burr, "will be ready for herr dinner in a quarter of an hour—bring a pint bottle of champagne. If I recollect rightly, his lordship said the 'vintage' is everything. Whatever that may be—mind the vintage."

She then followed her mistress into the bedroom and proceeded to order her about, just as she used to do in the far-off nursery days. Such a lapse was usually a sign of unwonted disapproval or of emotion. It was disapproval now — undisguised, deep disapproval. She pursed her lips.

"Now then, off with these clothes and away to your bath; guidness knows you must need it after these ridiculous galivantings in dirrty places; it's just monstrous!"

"I hate you, Robina," said Sybil, smiling at her affectionately.

"I'm not caring if you do, Miss Sybil. Away now!"

Sybil, in a long white wrap, vanished; but she popped her head round the bathroom door, wrinkled up her nose, and "made a face" before she finally disappeared. Robina first smiled, then—as she hurried back and began to pick up the discarded clothes—she twice wiped tears from her eyes. That "face" was tragically reminiscent of nursery days; the long white figure of the dear little white figure, which threw itself into Nursey's arms whenever anything went wrong! Now, the workings of her young mistress's mind were not so easy to follow. Sybil would have been in despair had she realized the heartaches of this poor devoted old soul, because she felt "out of it."

It must, however, be confessed that Robina brought some of the trouble upon herself; her methods did not tend to make the talker more communicative. That night, for instance, Sybil thanked her very sweetly for all her care and thought; and owned she felt better for her dinner and for the champagne.

"I shall be late again to-morrow night," she

said, "and I'm going to be late in the morning, too—don't wake me up. . . . Oh dear, this is comfy! My duckey little Elizabeth! I suppose she's sound asleep. Robina, I *do* miss her!"

"You should never have left her," snapped Robina, firmly tucking the sheets in.

Sybil's grey eyes twinkled with merriment, and grew grave again. She fingered the lace on the sleeves of her nightdress and glanced at the dressing-gown on a chair beside her. "Real lace, and lovely things in every direction! My baby sleeping with real lace round the pillows in her cot—that real women have sat for hours and days making; and I wonder about *their* homes, and *their* babies!"

"Tut!" snapped Robina impatiently.

"Ah! you don't know, Robina! You want to *see* it to believe what misery there is; here in this town—so many poor people!"

"Nasty creatures," said Robina. "Passes me what you want to go mixing yourself up with them. If they were respectable purrsons they'd never be in that condition. Good-night m'ledy."

The idea of sleeping late did not come to

much; whatever plans her conscious self developed, her sub-conscious self had apparently decided to be up with the lark. She breakfasted in the coffee-room. The hotel was fairly full in spite of the fact of its being August — people, perhaps, were "passing through" on their way North for the Twelfth. She had been in London six days, and it seemed more like six years. Nothing in life was really different; yet the whole world seemed astonishingly different.

Each morning she had by the post a full report of Elizabeth, and of her doings. She read that first, then other letters, and finally looked at the morning paper. She hated to breakfast in a hurry. This morning, as she opened the paper, she noticed—amongst the fashionable intelligence—that So-and-So and So-and-So, were paying a visit to So-and-So. All the names were well known in Society. She read this—certainly—but it did not interest her, although she happened to be acquainted with most of the people mentioned.

Presently, however, she heard the two ladies at the small table nearest to her own talking of her who with So-and-So was paying the

visit. They, the speakers, did not lower their voices, and these happened to be incisive.

"What an advantage rank is!" said one of them caustically. "Now, no one ever comments on ——" (she mentioned the two names of the paragraph). "In fact, everyone asks them about together. It is an established fact; but poor Mr. Brown, if he happens to love Mrs. Jones is—oh, shocking! and yet children all look Jones, not Brown."

Sybil turned her head; the speakers were very smart—but hard, unattractive women; none the less she smiled, for there was something ridiculous in that comment on the children looking Jones, not Brown. She buttered a piece of roll and considered. Whilst she considered, a tune from a musical comedy, and the words of the tune, slipped through her mind:

"Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee
The difference is hard to see,
Yet Tweedledee goes to the scum,
Whilst we make a saint of Tweedledum."

That was the end of Sybil's breakfast. The piece of buttered roll remained untouched. Who was the young woman in the blue dress? Why was she in Limehouse and going about

with that awful Jewess? What had happened to her? Instinct told Sybil one thing about her. Was it as a result of this thing that she was there, looking like that, though her face was so sweet, whilst So-and-So—who led the same kind of life—lived in pomp and luxury, laid foundation-stones, opened Charity Bazaars, and looked like a veritable harridan?

Most of that day Sybil spent in writing and reading indoors; but soon after five she set forth Eastwards, taking with her a large packet of illustrated fashion-papers. Her plans were definite enough: she intended to go and sit with Mrs. Howland for an hour or more, and then—punctually at eight o'clock when the policeman would come on duty—to be at the end of the market street. After that—well, after that would depend entirely upon what he told her.

She carried out her programme; rejoiced Mrs. Howland's heart with the fashion-papers, and found the policeman at five minutes past eight.

"Good evening," she said. "Well, were you successful?"

"I must hand you back your sovereign, lady," he answered, beginning the elaborate operations of a policeman who wishes to reach a pocket—"I must hand you back your sovereign, for I found out nothing about that young person, although I tried."

"No, indeed, I can't take the money back: thank you so very much for trying. But oh! I *am* disappointed! What happened? Did she stay with that awful woman? did they come out of the public-house together? Oh! I wish now—I *wish* I had not gone away!"

She clasped her hands: the policeman looked at her in surprise; he, indeed, was as curious in regard to Sybil as she in regard to the other. It seemed to him extraordinary that such a striking and distinguished-looking lady, with stray sovereigns at her disposal, should be wandering about these parts at night—entirely alone.

"What happened?" Sybil repeated.

"There was a row in the house," he said; "two women started fighting; the police were called in. In the scrimmage and noise at first I forgot that young person; but I suddenly caught sight of her. I've heard of looking

like a lost soul—if ever anyone looked like that, she did. We were just near the doorway when I called to her, 'Come along: you follow me'; I said, 'Don't be afraid. Follow me,' I said. I had no time for more. She looked as though she didn't understand; but she did understand, all the same, and she held on to my belt as we pushed our way through the door. What became of her after that I don't know. When we got back from the station I kept a sharp look out. The woman she had been with went in the house again after the row ended, and stopped there till closing-time. I saw her as she came out, and asked her where her young friend was. She said she only wished she knew, as the young person who had made off owed her a lot o' money."

"Owed her money!" Sybil exclaimed.

"So she said; but don't you believe it, lady! I made inquiries in every direction—till my beat ended—and after; and I've asked my mates who have been in this neighbourhood to-day, but no one has seen such a person."

It was a bitter disappointment. Somehow Sybil had felt convinced that she would find that other woman. She had, in her heart,

never doubted it. Yet she had vanished—absolutely and entirely disappeared. So dejected did Sybil look that the policeman sympathized.

"I'm truly sorry, lady," he said. "Someone you are looking for—interested in—wished to find?" he ventured.

"She is no one I ever saw in my life before, but there was something about her, wasn't there? Her face, her look has haunted me, and I was certain I should see her again tonight. Ah, well, you have been very, very kind. I feel so grateful to you. . . ."

In Limehouse there is not an excess of such suavity, nor of such beauty. More than ever was the police officer convinced that he was dealing with a Somebody. He saluted:

"I only wish I had been successful, my lady," he said.

"Ah, well!"

A horrible dejection and depression swept over Sybil. How dreary and desolate everything seemed! She wished—— What did she wish?

"I wish I had Elizabeth to cuddle! . . . Oh, I wish father were alive! . . . I wish I

could have a talk with Mr. Morrison." And then she told herself the truth. "What I wish is to see Æneas; what I wish is to be with Æneas . . . to see him, to be with him. Oh, I *want* him!"

She gulped down a sob; this was absurd. Always she had known that she could not see him, yet the sense of him—the longing she had for him—at that moment was overwhelming. An idea, a temptation came to her. She looked at her watch; it was not yet half-past eight. It was an extraordinarily safe time—the very safest of safe times. If Æneas were in London at all just now—and most probably he was not—he certainly would not be in the Temple. This was dinner-time, and she knew that he never dined there, so that—even if he were in London—no hour could be safer for her to go to Fountain Court. And how she would love to see where he lived! She looked again at her watch. He would not get back before ten at the earliest; she would be gone ages before that: she would be gone by a quarter past nine. Oh! she *must* do it! here was the motor-bus, and at the first opportunity she would take a taxi.

Fortune favoured her of course:—of course,

for she was in the game. She was one of the pawns, and Fate was about to make a move. The first time the motor-bus was stopped, Sybil noticed someone paying off a taxi-cab. She quickly left the bus and took the cab, asking to be driven to the Temple.

The porter was polite and admitted her, although her business was, perhaps, not over-definite; but she said she wished to go to Fountain Court, which from his direction was easy to find.

It was an oppressive night—very hot and still, and rather dark; but there were so many lights that the darkness did not seem to matter. "How quiet! I am glad he lives here," was her first feeling. "It is apart—distinctive. I am glad he lives here." She looked about the Court trying through the darkness to realize the buildings; wondering which precisely were Æneas's rooms. Suddenly a window was thrown up; voices sounded, and someone began to play the piano. She saw a figure at the window, and—fearing lest she should be noticed—walked away, following a little passage to the left, and arriving eventually at a wide space, which was King's Bench

Walk. Then she became a little anxious about the time. It was absurd to be anxious, and yet she wished to take no risks—to be well away before there could be any chance of Æneas's return. She retraced her steps towards Fountain Court; these people were not likely still to be looking out of the window, and even if they were, what could it matter? If they thought of her at all they might suppose she had been on a message, and was now returning; that was all. She entered Fountain Court; the window was still open, a light and pictures were to be seen, and someone was singing who had a beautiful baritone voice, and a most distinct enunciation: every word could be heard: someone was singing—with exquisite pathos—a soul-piercing air. She stood still and listened.

"Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows;
What are those blue remembered hills?
What spires, what farms are those?

"That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again."

Tears filled her eyes, but she must not stop to cry. It was getting late—close on half-

past nine. She stepped forward towards the archway leading through to Brick Court. The music had ceased; people were talking up there. Then suddenly she heard something else—something in the archway—a sob and "Oh, oh! oh! God!" And the sob and the words came from the very depths of somebody's heart.

Sybil stepped forward, peering in front of her, and in a flash she recognized that figure—in one second she saw her—the woman she wished to find—the woman with the blue dress and the desolate face. She did not stop to think; she opened wide her arms and took the poor Butterfly into them, kissing and caressing her.

"Dear! Oh, my dear! what is it? I knew I must find you again."

There was no mistaking Sybil's voice: low and soft and just a trifle drawling, it was none the less singularly clear. Æneas, about to enter the passage from the other side, in order to keep the Butterfly's appointment, heard and recognized it at once. He stood still in amazement.

"Did you? I—I never expected to see you again; but I should never forget you. . . ."

In spite of the sobs that was the Butterfly. He knew that voice well enough too.

The question of eavesdropping never entered his mind; he was too absolutely taken by surprise. What was this? How did these two women know one another? Why was Sybil here?

"Don't cry so," cooed Sybil. The sobs ceased to be so violent. The Butterfly, he knew, was mopping her eyes.

"Crying is not my way," she said at last, in a very broken voice; "but I'm dead beat. I walked about the streets all night. I've had no food, and those—those words—that song" —the sobbing recommenced—"they—they carried me back, oh such a time! Normandy —the farm—the happy highways"—she gulped hysterically; "it was straight, the highway was; and the poplars by the side of it straight too. Now—oh!—nothing is straight now!"

"You are worn out," said Sybil—"simply worn out. Come back to Claridge's Hotel with me. Come, we will go and get a cab."

"I can't," sobbed the Butterfly.

"Oh, why not? You must indeed."

"I can't. You—I never could say what

I think or feel about you—but that ends it. You are—I am—we are different. I——" She broke off, and Sybil answered impetuously:

"I don't care in the least what you are. What does it matter how different we are! I want you to come and let me take care of you. Oh, I *do* want you to!"

There was silence for an instant, then the Butterfly spoke. Her voice was steady and hard; it struck curiously on Æneas's ears, and thrilled him. What was she going to say?

"I shall be all right," she said; "I have come here to-night to see a man I used to live with. I should have been in his rooms by now only that music—that song upset me. . . . I am tired, or I should not have been so stupid. . . . I have asked him to help me, and he is certain to do it. I shall be all right."

Sybil betrayed neither surprise, nor dismay, nor disgust. Her voice was full of tenderness as before.

"Yes," she said; "but why not let me help instead? I do want you for a friend."

"You want me for a friend!" The Butterfly gave a hard little laugh. "Your class

don't want my class for friends. You don't understand: I was not the gentleman's wife."

"Oh, I completely understand that!" said Sybil, waving the statement aside by her tone. "What I say is, I want you for a friend. Won't you come back now to Claridge's with me? I am staying there." There was a little soft sound; it was clear the Butterfly was crying again, Sybil trying to comfort her.

"You'll think me so ungrateful," choked the Butterfly, "and, indeed, I am not ungrateful, and I would like to see you again sometime, if you will really let me. But, do you know, I do also want to see this man *very* much; he too is good. I believe in him more than in anyone else I ever knew, though it all only lasted such a short time! And then he knows about me; he knows what I did. I want to talk to him; I think, perhaps, he will know what I had better do now; don't you see?"

"Oh yes, I see," said Sybil slowly; "I do see." She sighed. There was an instant's silence, then she added, "About our meeting again; we do not know one another's names. We must——"

Æneas strained forward. The question of names had not occurred to him. The whole thing had been such an amazement. Now Sybil was about to give her name; what would the Butterfly say or do? As a rule—in ordinary circumstances—he knew that she would not give him away, but no woman is safe under stress of strong emotion.

He strained forward, listening intently, but the Butterfly made an unexpected interruption.

"What was that?" she said, in a hurried, frightened voice; "I thought I heard shouting; shouting terrifies me now! I must go—I must go; it will be past the time I said. He might not wait for me."

"Are his rooms near by here?" Sybil asked; "or have you to go on through these courts and places?"

It was clear that some feverish nervousness had now seized the Butterfly; when she answered she spoke very fast. She almost babbled:

"Quite close; here in fact. I was not supposed to know this address. I had another address and another name, and they would have sent the letter on. But men might just

as well trust one; it's so easy to find out. Not that I tried to find out, but from the first I knew he was a barrister, and that his name was Monteith, and so I wrote direct, for—because—well—because I was pressed. Can I come one day, perhaps, to see you afterwards? Good-bye, now; will you tell me your name before I go? *Will* you—really?"

Sybil heard nothing after the word Monteith. It seemed that her heart had stood still, and that the world had stopped.

Three times the Butterfly repeated, "Good-bye; *will* you tell me your name before I go?"

Æneas, too, heard that sentence uncomprehendingly, as though it were some foolish little parrot-cry. Its significance dawned on him and on Sybil simultaneously.

Then she spoke, and he listened:

"My name?" she said. "Yes, of course; my name is Masterton—it is Sophie Masterton."

CHAPTER XXI

It was a breathless summer's day—a cloudless sky of blue, and a scorching August sun. Although it was the middle of the morning Sybil had not yet left her room; she sat listlessly by her dressing-table, looking—without interest—at the necklace of seed-pearls laid out for her to wear with a simple gown of soft grey ninon, dainty lace at the throat and wrists of it. She looked ill and tired, and her eyes had black lines below them.

She was not going to the East End; she could not. Also it was Sunday, and Mrs. Howland would probably not expect her; people are so odd about Sunday. She thought longingly of Elizabeth; of Droon, of the sea, the air, the heather. Yes, Mr. Morrison was right—her's were "the pleasant places." She had better not have left them. What—after all—had come of it? of this excursion into "life" as lived by

others—as lived by millions of others? What had come of it? Well, knowledge—at least the knowledge that, whether her soul were on fire or no, her's were "the pleasant places." However much her heart might ache she had not to face, in addition, the pangs of hunger and of faintness; galling anxiety as to how to keep body and soul together; terror such as that girl had; nausea such as that girl must have felt at her squalid surroundings—that girl who also saw "the land of lost content."

Those words, that tune, and the heart-rending sob which had followed, kept running in her ears.

She clenched her hands, holding herself in. She had cried so much through the night, was so entirely overwrought, it would not do to begin again. . . . She had fought and struggled mentally, and found things out about her own character, her miserable little soul. She had discovered herself to be mean-spirited, grudging, jealous.

Had she not longed above everything that comfort and happiness should come to that girl? Yet, when she found that it was through Æneas comfort and happiness were likely to

come, she writhed; and grudged it. When she thought of what he had been to her, might again be to her, she writhed. She did not condemn the Butterfly—far from it. She was honest, and she tried to see straight. She did see straight, and knew that she writhed because she envied the other woman—because she, Sybil, would sell her soul to be in her place. That was the truth. . . .

Prayers, Mr. Morrison said, are sometimes answered more literally than one bargained for. "That I may know myself," Sybil had prayed. . . . Well, here was the answer. This was the true Sybil—grudging!

She looked into her own eyes reflected in the glass which faced her. "We are getting deep," she murmured.

Against the glass leaned a small illuminated text, beautifully hand-painted. There were three hundred and sixty-five such texts—one for each day of the year—and they had belonged to Sybil's mother, who herself had painted them.

Ever since Lady Colquhoun's death Robina had placed a daily text upon the dressing-table. Sometimes Sybil looked at it; sometimes not. To-day she took it up, and read:

"Whoso hath the world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and truth."

Over and over again Sybil read that text through a film of tears. This was the lesson she had come from Droon to learn—to love in deed and truth. . . .

It was easy enough to give that upon which one set no especial value.

Of "this world's goods" what could she have wished to withhold except Æneas? Yet it was just Æneas who was wanted.

"Mr. Monteith in your sitting-room, m'ledy, Robina announced, knocking and opening the communicating door, between the two rooms, in one and the same moment.

"Mr. Monteith!"

Sybil turned her head, flaming scarlet.

There, in a direct line with her dressing-table, stood Æneas. When he saw her he

moved his position, and made no sign of having seen her.

"Close that door," Sybil said. Robina closed the door. She was in a bustle of pleasurable excitement. Things were much more normal to-day—London clothes and a visitor.

"I met the man coming up to see if yourr ledyship would receive Mr. Monteith, and I just took upon myself to say yourr ledyship would be delighted——"

"You take a very great deal too much upon yourself."

Robina made no reply; she was offended, and walked off out of the room.

Sybil clasped her hands, and tried to think what to do. She would have liked time; ever so much more time! Even the facts were not yet clear in her mind; but she must remember this: *nothing* had happened. . . . All that she really knew she did *not* know. So far as Æneas was aware nothing had happened. If only he had not seen her sitting there fully dressed she might have said that she was not yet up; but he had seen her! As usual with Sybil, she plunged from the conclusion of her ideas into sudden action. Realizing that he

had seen her and that she must go, she immediately opened the sitting-room door and walked in.

Æneas stood at the far side of the room; very tall and fair; very smart, and very grave; his hat and gloves were on the table in front of him. He made no movement towards Sybil. He did not speak; but he looked at her, and pain was in his eyes. He looked straight at her. Something—clearly—was upon his mind. She leaned forward a trifle, her hands pressed upon the intervening table, and her lips parted, as though about to utter words which did not come.

"Sybil," he said, "I have a confession to make to you."

Again she felt the blood rush hot over her whole face. (She who used to laugh and say she could not blush!) She shrank back—this was too much—he was going to tell her about the other woman! Involuntarily she raised her hands, as though to ward it off.

"Must you?" she said. "Oh, please not.

It would have been a curious rejoinder had Æneas not understood. He smiled ever so

slightly—a smile of tenderness—not of amusement—and his grave, blue eyes grew softer still.

"I think I must, because of what you are; one counts on you. . . . What I want you to know immediately is the manner in which I discovered your whereabouts. I was on my way to my rooms in Fountain Court last night when I heard your voice: you were talking to —to someone else whom I knew. I got to the passage just as the fellow who was singing stopped; and I heard every word that passed."

"You stood and listened!" said Sybil.

"I stood and listened; yes."

Sybil moved across the room to a chair and sat down. She did not take much interest in the confession; it didn't seem to matter in the least about that. But she longed to know what Æneas had said and done, and arranged about that "someone else," and all the things she neither liked, nor dared, to ask.

On his part Æneas waited, very still. Women take such revelations differently from men; yet Sybil's goodness to the poor Butterfly made him hope. He stood very still. Not till the night before had he grasped quite

how much Sybil meant to him, and now his fate lay in the balance.

The colour had gone from her face; he saw as he looked at her that it was unusually white and sad, and he saw the dark rings under her eyes. He saw, too, those glorious grey eyes shining like stars, looking towards—yet, as it were past—and beyond him.

Trifling things occurred to his mind—as trifling things do strike people in moments of intense feeling. He saw that the cushion behind her head was blue—the blue which, before her mourning, she wore so frequently—that especial shade of soft grey-blue which made such a delicious background to her hair—and he found himself wondering whether it were her cushion, or whether it belonged to the hotel. Still neither of them spoke. At last, however, Sybil sighed. It was a sigh with a sob in it—and she closed her eyes. Æneas moved nearer; he drew a chair up, sat down, and spoke.

"Will you allow me to tell you a little about that person—her name is Mrs. Duval—the lady whom you were talking to last night?"

"Yes," she said; "I wish that you would."

"Her father was a gentleman, and her mother a very well-known Frenchwoman in" —he hesitated—"of a certain kind."

"Yes," said Sybil.

"And she——"

"I understand all that," Sybil said, frowning, moving a little impatiently. . . . "But I cannot understand why she is in such terrible trouble, and in such places. I saw her——" She stopped.

"She told me where she first saw you," Æneas said. "I will explain to you, Sybil, as quickly as I can. She married: and it has been a failure. She ran away, but she did not go back to the life she had led before. She was trying to get work, employment in shops —work of that kind——"

"But she was in a public-house."

"Yes, I know. You can have all the details if you like, but I have given you a truthful outline."

Sybil looked at him.

"After all," she said rather icily, "I have no business really to ask anything about it—it all *really* is no business of mine."

"No?" Æneas felt his heart give a thump. "Yet, I wondered—I wondered—if you would make it your business—if you would help me?"

She said nothing for a long instant. Then she asked, "How?"

"I drove Mrs. Duval up to Bloomsbury last night, and she got a room there, with someone she knew. She preferred it to an hotel—as she had no luggage: but I don't want her to stay there—I want to fetch her away to-day. . . . I don't want her to feel forlorn and absolutely friendless, and I do want to get her back to her husband again—he—well, I never saw a man knocked more completely flat!"

"Do you know her husband?"

"No—but I went and found him late last night."

"Tell me about the husband," Sybil said softly. Æneas got up and began to pace about the room. He walked from end to end twice before he answered that.

"Her husband was a bombastic little bounder: now he looks like an india-rubber figure that's had the wind let out. He is a wealthy City man, and has always posed as being highly respectable and pious. He lived

with his mother and a sister in Lancaster Gate. When he married he deceived them both as to who the lady was, and how he met her. He deliberately deceived them. When she ran away he lost his head and told them the truth. . . . They packed their trunks and left him with the request that he should turn out of the Lancaster Gate house, bag and baggage, into some place of his own as speedily as possible. He is disgraced and bereft; and I can see he really loved his wife, although he made a desperate mess of his dealings with her—poor devil! I think you would be sorry —if you saw that little, common-looking chap."

Sybil looked up at Æneas as he said those words. Kind and strong, he was a man indeed; and such a very "grand seigneur"! yet altogether human: and the last words he used, though ordinary words enough, seized her imagination.

"If you saw that little, common-looking chap!" The bombastic little figure from which the wind had gone! She did see him in the big house; deserted—disgraced.

"Æneas," she said swiftly, "just tell me what it is you suggest—what you would like?

I will do anything—I only want to help you. Shall I stay here and have her here to stay?—Mrs. Duval—or would you like us both to go to Droon—and wait?

He stood and faced her, but not very near . . . the whole air was charged—it would be dangerous to be too near . . . his eyes were moist, and his voice a little shaky. . . .

"It is splendid, it is noble of you, Sybil," he said, "and it is what in my heart of hearts I believed you would do."

"Thank you," she answered, and dropped her eyes—she could not look.

After he had gone she wondered at herself, realizing that the mainspring of the appeal he had made to her lay in negative action; she appreciated the fact that he had not apologized, nor in any manner attempted to explain away his own relations with the Butterfly; neither had he commented on her—Sybil's—being in Limehouse at night.

It was settled that she and Mrs. Duval should meet, not at Claridge's, but at some other hotel—farther afield. Eventually the Palace Hotel, Kensington, was decided upon as being in a pleasant position and close to good shops.

CHAPTER XXII

To be an onlooker! to watch—with understanding—the intricate weavings of the web of destiny! to watch the game of Fate when "all the world's" the board about which Destiny has wove her web! to see the floundering of the pawns amongst the meshes! to see the giant hand of Fate—sure, far-reaching, absolute—swoop down through space upon those pawns: now, with a tiny prod, involve one more deeply in the tangle; extricate another; sunder or re-unite.

To be an onlooker when the game is such as that!

* * * * *

Æneas returned to his chambers after he left Sybil. A letter from Mrs. Quintin awaited him forwarded from Scotland—where she had expected him to be at that time. It had arrived by Saturday's last post; now he recol-

lected that he had never opened it, nor, for that matter, any other letters by that post. He turned it, and held it for a moment in his hand, looking at the pointed old-fashioned handwriting—and as he looked—a sense of swift happenings came upon him; he broke the seal and read:

"NEW YORK,
"*August* 3.

"MY DEAR ÆNEAS,

"I write to you as a woman who is in trouble writes to a man in whom she trusts; and so I shall but state the facts, and what I want; I shall not plead—nor endeavour to persuade you.

"Lois is marvellously restored in health. She took a sudden unexpected turn about five weeks ago. It appears such a thing is most unusual; the doctors were puzzled, and did not think the change would last—but it has lasted. She is quiet and contented, and seems to have regained her reason; only she has forgotten things. I have had congestion of the lungs and have been very ill, and am not yet allowed to leave my bedroom; there was, however, no longer cause for anxiety about

me, and—when the news of Lois continued this way for some weeks—Mr. Quintin thought it his first duty to go over to see her. You know the doctors have always been averse to our bringing her back to this country, on account of the long sea-voyage (it was considered that the voyage might in some way have affected her before), so Mr. Quintin left me a fortnight since, and he has seen Lois once; but nothing has been arranged. And now he has had a stroke—they cable me he is seriously ill. He lies at the Metropole Hotel. I pray God by next week's boat I may get off—I shall and must. Meantime, will you go to him for me, Æneas? remembering that he is a stranger in a strange land, and that I write to you as a woman in trouble to a man.

"Yours,

"CORDELIA F. QUINTIN."

Æneas, abstracted, folded the letter with the utmost care, replaced it in its envelope, and the envelope in his pocket. His sense of swift happenings had been correct. Events were moving at a pace which bewildered him. Lois restored to reason! Lois, his wife, for

whom he felt no longer anything but distressed pity, for whom his original ephemeral passion had entirely passed. Lois restored to reason! . . . He looked across the room. That was where the Butterfly had sat—in that wing arm-chair; that was where she had sat the night before, and poured out her pitiful history—the Butterfly, whom Sybil was going to befriend; whom he and Sybil together were going to befriend. How miserable Sybil had looked, and how ill!—Good God! what a hideous mess! Why had he been in such a hurry? If he had not been in such a hurry how different everything might be! And the man who had forced the pace was Mr. Quintin!

Gad! how he had forced the pace! It was very difficult to believe in his singleness of purpose; there might be no case for the Law Courts, as had been settled, but Æneas himself had never been thoroughly convinced. Thinking it over in cold blood, he could not but be conscious of the tension, the extraordinary anxiety Mr. Quintin had displayed to get that matter settled; and it was to this man, as it were to his worst enemy, he was asked to go. It seemed to Æneas that he had conquered

much, attained much, in keeping his feeling latent; for months he had not allowed himself to feel resentment—he felt none. He felt very truly grieved and sorry for them all. But to take action, to act definitely as this man's friend . . . that was a good deal to ask of him.

He reached out his hand for his hat. In moments of stress Æneas always had the desire to move, a desire for action. He wanted to walk; to walk fast and think hard.

Long strides carried him eastwards down the Embankment, then over Blackfriars Bridge to the south of the river, and he turned towards Southwark. He walked as he had walked the day the letting of Flotten had been decided upon—seeing nothing, and no one whom he passed; wrestling with himself. Till now he had not realized how bitterly he still felt about Mr. Quintin—the bitterness had merely been quiescent — and then he had declared that nothing would persuade him to see that man again! Many times he had said this to Alexander Forbes; and it was not easy to Æneas to give way—to go back upon his decision. Moreover, if he went to Mr. Quintin

now, he must go having swept the past entirely from his mind; he must go cheerfully. Could he do that?

A curious smell attracted his attention, and he began to look around him, wondering how far he had come. He was in Southwark amongst hop factories. Being Sunday, it was all very deserted and quiet, but on turning into the Borough High Street there were many more people about. Close to Bedale Street a woman with a racking cough passed him; she had an apron over her head, and was carrying a jug—an emissary from some by-way no doubt—going to fetch the beer for dinner! Bits of dirty rag hung from the bottom of her skirt, and her shoes were trodden down at heel. His mind went for a moment from the consideration of Mr. Quintin to the Butterfly; he thought of all that she had told him—he thought of Sybil amongst those people at Stepney and Limehouse. He frowned and walked on; reaching London Bridge he watched the traffic—a never-ceasing stream of vehicles and of little black, moving figures. From a distance they would look like ants upon an ant-heap.

What an atom—what an iota one is! That thought held him. One solitary figure amongst the millions that are upon the face of the earth! Who was he to sit in judgment on another of the figures? What qualifications had he for judging? He felt humbled—ashamed at his resentment. Supposing Mr. Quintin had done this thing, hadn't he—Æneas—done heaps of things which other people might consider reprehensible? A voice within him answered, "Yes, but not mean things; not crooked things." He took off his hat for a moment (by this time he was halfway over the bridge)—he took it off and looked at the river; breathed deep, and let the air go through and over him. He had decided to think no more. Those questionings but complicated matters—he would think no more, and go to his father-in-law at the Metropole Hotel.

Time began to press; there was the Butterfly to fetch. He was to take her to Kensington in the late afternoon; he had intended to take her out into Regent's Park or somewhere into the air and sunshine before that. However, that must be given up; he

had named five o'clock in the note he sent up to her, and it would have to be five. It was two o'clock now; he must get a snack of lunch somewhere, and go direct to the hotel. . . .

All resentment, every kind of feeling except dismay and intense pity, passed from Æneas when he saw Mr. Quintin—the wreck of Mr. Quintin—lying on that bed. Instead of the vital, keen personality, a drawn, distorted face was turned towards him, and uncertain, half-glazed eyes met his. . . . It was extremely difficult to speak naturally — to keep the concern he felt from manifesting itself too palpably in his voice.

"I am distressed not to have been to you before, sir; but Mrs. Quintin's letter, telling me you were laid up, only reached my chambers last night, and I was very late, and opened my letters this morning."

A further shock awaited Æneas. It was only with the greatest difficulty that he was able to understand anything whatever of Mr. Quintin's reply; so much had the illness affected his speech.

The interview was painful in the extreme, and, as it seemed to Æneas, useless. All that money could provide had already been provided. Both Mr. Quintin's private secretary (who travelled with him) and his servant were devoted; and they had left no stone unturned. A famous physician had the case in hand, and there were three trained nurses; but it was hopeless, inasmuch as the patient could never be himself again—or so the secretary said. Æneas wondered whether Mr. Quintin had even grasped who he was—whether the visit had afforded him any satisfaction; but it might gratify the wife, satisfy her, perhaps, and that was something.

His heart ached for Mrs. Quintin; he decided to cable to her, and did so.

"Have seen your husband. Every arrangement had been made for his best possible comfort. Shall see him daily."

The letter which he also next must write would be far more difficult to word.

Sad at heart and deeply pondering, Æneas set off for Bloomsbury, again walking. Across Trafalgar Square, up Shaftesbury Avenue he

went. He had settled to call at the Metropole the following morning, and had given the secretary his telephone number, and his address. He decided that he would not send any letter to Mrs. Quintin until after this next visit. If she—if Mrs. Quintin—were not able to come to England, she would he hoped write much more fully in respect to Lois.

If Lois were restored to reason, Æneas's place, in this trouble, was with her. But she had "forgotten things." What did that mean? Had she forgotten her marriage? . . . He felt greatly disturbed lest he should in any way neglect his duty—the more anxious because of all that had happened in the interval. He decided that he would cable again—cable that same day—and ask whether he should go to Lois. Having settled that point his mind was somewhat lightened; and he hurried down Hart Street, and on to the house at which the Butterfly was lodging.

Here fresh difficulties awaited him. To-day, is not as yesterday with such natures as hers, and the Butterfly was in an impossible kind of mood. She could not come down, or would not. Anyway, she insisted on his going up to

that tawdry little room and there talking to her.

"But you've got your hat on. You seem to be quite ready. Why not have come down?" he asked.

"Where could we talk? We can't talk quietly in the street. . . . I—I don't see what I am to do about clothes. . . . I look awful—frightful! Oh dear, oh dear!" She wrung her hands.

"Never mind. You don't look frightful at all; and you can soon have new clothes, anyway."

"And then that lady. She is an angel, I'm sure. But I think of those days—of Mrs. and Miss Duval, of Horace—and I wonder, will she—that lady—expect me to live like that again? Besides, what's to be the end of it—how is it all to end? Last night something you said put into my head the idea that your real wish is that I should go back to Horace. You are not thinking of that, are you?"

"Yes," said Æneas; "I am."

"I never, *never* could—I never, *never* would!" she burst forth. "You don't begin to understand." She stopped, facing him.

Æneas said nothing.

The Butterfly came nearer, laid her two hands upon the lapels of his coat, and spoke very softly.

"Alick," she said, "could I not go back to you?"

Almost savagely he removed the hands, saying: "No; certainly not."

"Dear me!"

She shrugged her shoulders, making a *moue*.

It struck his heart, her little silly attitude, for he was near to the foundation of things that day.

"Oh, Flutterby, Flutterby!" he said gently. "Why so terribly inconsequent? Think of all you said to me last night."

"I was dead tired last night," she answered; "frightened, overwrought—a case of when the devil is sick. One has moods. . . . You have moods apparently. '*No; certainly not.*'" She mimicked his tone, and gave a rather insolent laugh, which she checked in a moment, however; a change coming over her face. She took a step nearer, narrowing her eyes. "By the way, Alick, what was that lady doing in Fountain Court last night?"

"Really," he said, "I did not presume to question her."

"I can tell you: she was going to see you."

He flamed. "She was entirely unaware of my being in London."

"Bah! Tell the Marines."

Æneas shook with rage. He would not allow himself to speak, and the Butterfly was quick to notice that, and quick to guess the reason.

"You would like to kill me," she said; "but you daren't even speak for fear of giving the show away. My dear, the show is as plain as a pikestaff. You love her. She loves you. Amen. Therefore, 'No; certainly not.'"

Again she mimicked him. Again she laughed, and, walking across to the glass, began to readjust her hat; but all the while in the glass she watched Æneas. Jealousy spurred her. She was trying to hurt; she wanted to see him hurt; but she could not fathom what she saw. Was he hurt? or was he merely furious?

Presently Æneas spoke.

"Under these circumstances—since you have no real feeling of respect for or gratitude to-

wards that lady—you will see that it is impossible for me to be the medium of your going to her. I do respect her; and I have double responsibility since she happens to have married a relative of mine. If you arrange it, it must be entirely between yourselves. I can take no further part in the matter, and so I may as well bid you good-bye."

"Oh, Alick, for goodness' sake don't go away! For goodness' sake don't go! What shall I do? What will happen if you go?"

She faced him, looking distracted. He was preparing to make a move.

"Oh—oh, *do* be reasonable," she moaned.

In spite of everything that made him smile.

"Why didn't you get a cab or something and let us start, if you wanted me to go to that hotel in Kensington?"

He hesitated. Then:

"Look here, Butterfly," he said, "I'd like to say one or two things straight. If you go to Kensington I hope you may be able to avoid talking too outrageous nonsense; but above all, I hope you'll look upon it as a step back home."

"Never," she said, with decision. "And

also what on earth is the good of thinking of such a thing? You little know my Horace if you think he would receive me. Not he!"

"You are wrong there," said Æneas. "He wants you."

"How do you know?" she asked sharply.

"He told me. I have seen him. He has had to leave Lancaster Gate, and his mother and sister have left him."

"What! Why?"

"I say they have left him; they disapprove of him."

"Gracious!" cried the Butterfly, collapsing on to a cane-bottomed chair, very much astonished. Then her tone altered. "Oh, well, after all," she said, "I think it is a real good thing to upset their equilibrium; they've had a great deal too much prosperity and respectability in that family—that's what makes them so hopeless. I'm not at all sorry: I'm glad they're being jogged up a bit."

Æneas turned away.

"You would not be glad if you saw him," he said.

The Butterfly dropped her eyelashes and sighed.

"What a nuisance!" she remarked.

"Look here," said Æneas, again facing her. "Why did you marry Duval?"

"Why did I marry him! You know perfectly well: I wanted to settle myself. I thought it would be better—wiser—and he is so very well off. I had no idea how deadly it would be; I had no idea living people could be so deadly."

"Yes," said Æneas, "that is just what I thought; you married in order to live on his money—I don't want to be brutal—but that really is treating matrimony as a profession; isn't it?"

"I suppose so—yes. It is. I think it is."

"Most certainly it is. Now, Butterfly, I've always thought you fair-minded. Is it cricket to behave as you have done?"

"I tried," she faltered. "I tried for ten mortal weeks."

"Ten weeks!—and what was your complaint? You were dull—unendurably dull. I don't make light of it. I know quite well that for a person of your temperament it is the greatest trial conceivable, but you had——"

"I had been paid for," she interposed.

Æneas looked straight at her.

"You had," he said, "if you prefer to put it that way. You sold yourself, and you were not the only one who had to count the price."

There was a pause . . . a long pause—for two or three minutes neither spoke. Then the Butterfly said:

"When a woman marries a man to accomodate herself and not because she cares for him—when, in fact, she takes up matrimony 'as a profession'—you think she must abide by the rules and customs of that profession. Well—speaking for myself—I say that if she is not utterly selfish and horrid she must realize that too. I—oh, how am I to put it? What does it matter how I put it?" (All the same, for some reason which astounded herself, the Butterfly grew crimson.) "I can assure you I did—and I tried to look contented: more—I tried to be gay; I've always been gay. I thought that was part of it, and would be expected of me. I assure you——" She broke off, then continued disjointedly:

"What I did overlook is the thing you said just now—that I was not the only one to

count the price. I never realized the risks he ran, or that his mother and sister could conceivably leave him; he was so fond of them both, and they apparently wrapped up in him."

Æneas gazed at her. She had reverted to her mood of the night before.

"But he knew the risks he ran," he said slowly, "and they have been converted into realities, perhaps as deadly as those realities which faced you. You have been tired, frightened, and hungry; he has been stripped of all that he prized—the affection and company of wife, mother, and sister. His veneer of piety and respectability are gone. That's the way; those things have to go: false things can't last."

The Butterfly stood up. Something in Æneas's voice thrilled her.

"You know?" she questioned, and he answered:

"I know. . . . My own false gods are down, Butterfly. Have a good shot at it. Think it well over. Try if you can't make up your mind to go back."

She turned away, and, leaning her arms

on the mantelpiece, she buried her head in them.

When at last she spoke it was to say:

"Take me now to Kensington to that lady."

And he did not remind her that he had no longer been prepared to do so.

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE are disadvantages about old servants; they presume; they "want to know too much." Robina sorely tried Sybil that Sunday afternoon.

"Oh, very well, then, Robina," she said at last; "if you so much disapprove of doing anything on a Sunday — don't do it! Go away, please. I'll pack my things myself."

"Cerrtainly not," rolled Robina.

"If you stay, then, *please* make no further comments."

There was silence for a few minutes. Sybil —as was her custom—was herself packing her dressing-bag. Robina, bending over a small trunk, made angry rustlings of tissue-paper.

"Whether you keep these rooms on or not, m'ledy, everything in them must be locked up. I shall pack all your trunks, and take the keys away with me."

"Where are you going then?"

"With yer ledyship, to be sure."

"But I have already said I do not require you, and that I wish you to stay here."

"Me stay here! and you go away? I heard ye say it, but I did not believe it."

"All the same that is the arrangement," said Sybil; then, relenting, she smiled round at Robina. "Me stay here," she added, "and try to get Me into a nicer temper!"

But Robina was in no mood for chaff. She thoroughly disapproved—and the culminating point was reached when her mistress drove off—directing the cabman to go to the Western District Post-Office, and leaving no address; saying only that she did not anticipate being absent for many days, and would send for her letters.

"It's this awfu' craze her ledyship has taken about the poor. She'll be away off guidness knows where; she'll be doing guidness knows what!" Robina was really unhappy and anxious, poor thing. So she sat on a small easy-chair in Sybil's deserted bedroom, and mopped tears from her eyes. "It's from her mother she gets it," she decided. "She, too, would 'a' gone

slumming if his lorrdship would 'a' let her; but his lorrdship had more sense."

Sybil reached the Palace Hotel in good time, and secured a nice little set of rooms, in which she and the Butterfly could be perfectly quiet and to themselves. She recollected having said that her name was Masterton, and she had not arranged anything about that with Æneas. It was a fact which he would not forget, however. Would he ask for her as Mrs. Masterton, or would he ask for her as Lady Monteith? Which name had she better give? This question worried her considerably as she drove Westwards, but she ultimately decided on her own name. If they were really to be friends—if Mrs. Duval ever came to Droon—she would have to know it. She might just as well do so at once. So Sybil took the rooms, signed the visitors' book—"Sybil, Lady Monteith, and Mrs. Duval"—and awaited the arrival of the others in the hall.

She had not long to wait—barely a quarter of an hour.

Æneas came no farther than the hall, and stayed but a few moments. He had dreaded this meeting, and he felt grateful to Sybil for

being downstairs; it was less awkward than an interview in her private rooms would have been. As he walked away his eyes grew very soft—so simply she had met them both! so naturally! and yet with tenderness. The vision of those two when he left them, moving away from him together, down the wide corridor, remained in his mind.

"I will write to you," were Sybil's last words, "and the name here is Monteith."

She explained the matter to the Butterfly as she poured out tea, and she did it well, taking the whole thing as a matter of course; taking it with a high hand; not quite in a manner after her own heart, but in a manner to save the situation; for, after all, there was Æneas to think of!

"I did not then know quite what was going to happen, nor how things were," she said, "and I thought it would be a very tiresome complication if I had told you then that my name is also Monteith."

Mrs. Duval turned her large, dark blue eyes on to Sybil, who met them full, and gazed into them in guileless fashion.

"But then, that class is trained to dissemble

over those things," was the Butterfly's mental comment.

An intangible something seemed to spring up and plant itself between them, and separate them. The more Sybil felt that intangible presence—the harder she struggled to be natural—the more vivid the sense of separateness became; and the Butterfly felt it too. Everything they touched upon had a painful background. Even clothes, which Sybil hailed as a joyful possibility for discussion—*à propos* to their shopping on the next day—even clothes did but remind the Butterfly of her dearth of them, and the reason of it. Perhaps they might have spoken of Æneas, only Sybil could not, absolutely could not, begin; and the Butterfly purposely refrained. Once only she mentioned him; quoting him—"Alick says"—and the very word "Alick" was for Sybil a reminder of things she wished to forget. So the evening trailed through rather wearily. When they parted for the night Sybil tried to put into a kiss something of the warmth she felt that she had failed to show otherwise; but then the Butterfly shrank back—shrank away as though half frightened!

Choked by a sense of failure, disgusted with and disappointed in herself, Sybil went to her room. She had failed in the thing she was doing to help Æneas, in the charge he had put into her hands. Where above everything she had wished to succeed she had failed! And would it be any easier to-morrow? Could she hope to do better then?

On a table by her bedside was a large photograph of Elizabeth in a mother-of-pearl frame. She looked at it, and as she looked a thought came to her—an illuminating thought.

"Yes!" she said, as though speaking to the baby; and, "Oh! you *little* love! Why yes, of course; that's it."

Then suddenly, and very quickly, she left the room, and making her way to the hall asked there for a telegraph form.

"I want this wire sent off," she said, "either now or the first thing in the morning, it is most important."

The telegram was to her nurse.

"Catch seven o'clock train from Oban to-morrow evening; bring baby south by it; will meet you Euston Tuesday morning. —MONTEITH."

Sybil said nothing of what she had done. She was so sure that Elizabeth would break the ice. Elizabeth would work wonders; and oh! she yearned herself to see that little creature!

So Monday went better. There was movement too—things to do. Mrs. Duval bought some underlinen, a coat and skirt, and a blouse or two. That, she said, was all that was necessary. No; she did not care for anything which was not really necessary. She remained reserved, dulled, restrained.

"She has got her things, and is quite well," was all Sybil could say to Æneas. "I will write more fully to-morrow."

His response was equally scrappy; he, too, would write again. The chief point in his letter seemed to be "Duval's address, in case you want it." "Duval's telephone number." Æneas was sanguine. To her it seemed that they were still far from wanting that.

From Monday in the early afternoon, Sybil began to follow Elizabeth's journey. By now she would be on board *The White Lady*. *The White Lady* was still in existence, one of the terrible extravagances, to which Mr. Forbes

wished Æneas's co-operation in putting a stop. They would be at this point; they would be at that; they would be in the train, and so on. On Tuesday she was up before six, had a cup of coffee and a roll in her room, and started off for Euston in a taxi—specially ordered overnight. It was a morning prelude to another hot day; fresh and glorious. Sybil herself, happy at the thought of seeing her baby, looked fresh and glorious too.

Elizabeth crowed and kicked with delight. She came off the journey as fresh as a daisy, having slept the whole night through. Only the nurses had been uneasy, wondering whether the hasty summons "meant your ladyship was ill," which made Sybil laugh.

Arrived, Elizabeth underwent a change of toilet; she then was carried, in all her wealth of golden curls and dainty whiteness, into the sitting-room, just as Sybil and the Butterfly—the latter tired after a restless night—were concluding their breakfast. Under Elizabeth's left arm was tucked a dilapidated monkey, and in her little right hand she held a large rattle of silver and coral. On seeing her mother she laughed aloud (her crowing laugh),

beating the air with her arms, dropping the monkey, and causing bells on the rattle to ring.

Sybil rose and took her; the nurse having picked up the monkey, backed towards the door, and left the room.

"This," said Sybil, "is my little daughter; she has just arrived from Scotland."

"*How* pretty she is!" said Mrs. Duval, looking with interest at Elizabeth.

"Yes, and as good as she is beautiful. Come to this lady, baby. . . . Will you take her?"

The Butterfly shrank back, flushing.

"Oh, I dare not! It would not be safe. I should drop it. I never held a baby in my life." There was a pathos in the statement and in the tone which did not escape Sybil.

"You needn't be afraid; Elizabeth holds on like a real little limpet. She won't let you drop her."

She stood Elizabeth on the Butterfly's knee. "Love Mrs. Duval, baby. Love her; give her a real, real big hug."

The tiny arms closed round the Butterfly's neck; the little body rocked itself from side to side upon her knee.

"Oo-oo-oo," gurgled Elizabeth, "oo-oo-oo."

And Sybil saw that the Butterfly was crying —just ever so little, and holding the baby very close. Again an inspiration, an instinct, came to her. She acted on it at once, as was her wont.

"She'll be all right with you for a minute or two," she said, "won't she?" and before the Butterfly could answer she had gone.

She took Æneas's letter from her pocket on her way to the telephone, and rang up the number he gave.

"Yes."

"Is that Mr. Duval?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am Lady Monteith, speaking from the Palace Hotel, Kensington. Your wife is here, you know. Can you come now—at once—and see her?"

"Yes." Then anxiously, "She is not ill?"

"Not at all ill; but be quick."

Click went the receiver.

He would start at once; in a quarter of an hour he would be here. Had she done a foolish thing, or had she not? It was too late to consider now—so she did not consider—and

her habit was when she acted on an inspiration, to leave things at that; let them follow their course.

The Butterfly and Elizabeth were sitting on the floor; they were firm friends. Elizabeth shook the rattle, and the Butterfly made the dilapidated monkey dance. Sybil joined them, clapped her hands, and hummed "The Bonnets o' Bonnie Dundee." There might have been no trouble in the world.

"Oh how sweet she is! Is it possible!" Mrs. Duval exclaimed, when Elizabeth, suddenly bored, dropped the rattle, rolled over on her side and crawled away.

"Isn't she? She is an everlasting joy. Baby, dear, come back! And listen, Mrs. Duval; I want to tell you something."

Sybil was in an awkward position, leaning forward to catch the baby by its legs; her face, with just a little more colour than usual in her cheeks, came near to the other woman's.

"I want to tell you something. I did not love my husband—I did not really love him, I mean. I was very ignorant; I did not know what marriage meant—I did not know

what love meant. But the baby is an unspeakable joy; if he — if my husband — had lived, I think she must have drawn us more together."

The Butterfly gulped down a sob.

"Ah!" she said, "all that—those things—I don't believe—Oh, don't I. because it's impossible——"

She got up suddenly, and moved to the sofa. She buried her face in the cushions, and her shoulders shook; they heaved and shook. She was sobbing. Sybil followed and knelt beside her.

"My dear, you can—of course you can," she was saying; "you can, and you *will!*"

There was a tap at the door. Sybil answered it, stepping out into the passage.

"Would she receive Mr. Duval?" He himself was waiting farther along the passage.

He had a peculiar welcome—no explanation. His unknown hostess—whose eyes were wet—wrung his hand, led him without a word into the sitting-room, and, pointing to the figure of his wife, gathered a remonstrating baby from the floor and went off.

It was more than an hour later when an hotel

servant, seeking for Sybil, found her in the drawing-room.

"Would she be good enough to go to Mrs. Duval?"

The Butterfly flung herself into Sybil's arms.

"I am going home," she said.

Her face was tear-stained. She was very hysterical, but she looked happy. And as to Mr. Duval! "He is puffing," thought Sybil. "Oh, I hope he won't get too india-rubberified!" But her heart softened when, after thanking her, he added:

"Words can never say what I feel about Mr. Monteith."

CHAPTER XXIV

For Æneas also Monday had been a day of stress. He saw his father-in-law once more, almost unrecognizable, and quite unconscious; he had had another seizure—the third, and the most severe. Death was now to be prayed for, and death came—that night.

All necessary arrangements and plans could be carried out by the secretary, and Æneas felt that his own obvious duty was to go to Mrs. Quintin. Her answer in respect to his seeing Lois had been an emphatic negative. "On no account should you go there yet," was her message. It was a relief to him; (although he hated himself for feeling relieved), but it had made him the more anxious to do all in his power for these people, whom sorrow had indeed touched with a heavy hand.

Mr. Earle, Mr. Quintin's secretary, had received full instructions from his chief—in

anticipation of the end. The body was to be cremated at once, and in privacy; and the ashes taken to America in due course. This Mr. Earle—a dapper little man with sharp features, and a face which betrayed nothing in the way of emotion—looked up at Æneas, and down at his own very un-English shoes, tied with ribbon-bows, and up at Æneas again.

"I had a message to deliver to you, Mr. Monteith, sir. Mr. Quintin charged me to give it. He directed me to say that he was very much obliged to you for visiting him, but that his will had been made previous to your doing so."

A shadow of a smile appeared to flit across that expressionless countenance.

"Very lucky!" said Æneas. "The poor fellow was certainly beyond business when I saw him."

But it was an effort to speak with indifference. That message appeared a most unmerited and cruel insult, and deeply wounded him.

"Curse!" he muttered; making his way back to his chambers.

It shook his resolve to go to Mrs. Quintin.

On his doing that, some vile interpretation might also be put. But better sense conquered. In life it is, after all, useless to weigh the interpretations which may be put upon one's actions. The responsibility for truth and singleness of purpose lies only with oneself, and—whilst unprejudiced—he had thought right that he should go. He would go. He sat down and wrote a long letter to his father telling him of the events: of Mr. Quintin's death; of Mrs. Quintin's illness; of Lois's recovery. He was fortunate enough to secure a passage by the Wednesday's boat, and cabled to Mrs. Quintin:

"I start on Wednesday, coming out to you. —ÆNEAS."

Then he set off to see Sybil, and was astonished to hear that she had left the Palace Hotel—that both she and Mrs. Duval had left!

He went to Claridge's, and there he found a transformed and radiant Sybil at five-o'clock tea! Everything seemed to have been wiped out by her joy over the one who had been rescued. It was quite like the parable! She rattled on, talking to him, giving him full

details, unreservedly, naturally—as she used to do when they were good pals in her husband's lifetime. Her exhilaration was like a breath from the moors.

"And you did it—*you* did it! I can truly say that is the greatest joy of all to me."

But he did not know the entire significance of those words.

"Phew!" he whistled. "I did it, did I?" He smiled happily, for Sybil's joy was infectious. "I did it, did I? And pray, m'lady, who had the great ideas? And whose baby is Elizabeth?"

Sybil was standing at the far side of the table, cutting a cake. She looked up, and an unfamiliar light flashed into her eyes; that light was as electrifying as the words with which she answered his foolish question.

"Yours," she said. "Everything that is mine is yours—everything I have, and am; *everything!* For 'I am like the mistletoe, which hath no root and cannot grow, save by the strength of that same tree it clings about; so I to thee!' . . ."

"Sybil!"

She had grown white, and the words fell

very slowly from her lips; all the gaiety had gone. She had the earnestness of one who participates at some great sacrament.

"Yes. You know it, and I know it. And for once I wish to put it into words—to hear myself telling you."

Swiftly Æneas was beside her; but she raised her left hand warding him back—away—with intense solemnity. They stood, looking deep into each other's eyes, for a long moment. Then Sybil moved.

"This is seed-cake," she said. "Will you have some seed-cake?"

Truly women are extraordinary creatures, and very different from men! Æneas gave a short bitter laugh, and turned away.

"*Lois has regained her reason. Lois has regained her reason.*"

The words clanged like a dirge in his ears! Monstrous that he, who was not inhuman, not cruel, should feel other than rejoiced at that news. And in the fact itself he did rejoice. But poor Lois!—poor unsuspecting Lois!—she loomed there, the phantom of a great mistake. Mad, or sane, the wife whom he had ceased to love! the personification of a mockery!

Sybil had reseated herself, but still Æneas stood; his back to her, facing the window; absolutely motionless. She watched him—uneasy.

"Æneas," she said at last softly.

"Yes?" He turned; his face was grey and drawn.

"Oh, oh! my dear! Did I do that?" Tears were in her voice; she moved towards him.

He answered almost rudely:

"Do what? What do you mean? Give me a cup of tea, Sybil, please—oh, never mind its being strong: for goodness' sake don't ring for more. I like tannin. . . . Thanks . . . I just want to tell you my plans, and hear yours. Do you remain in town?"

"I thought not now," she said. "I want to go once more to Limehouse to see a sick woman I got to know there; then I had thought we would go home to-morrow night."

"Good," he said. "I myself am going to New York to-morrow. My father-in-law died yesterday—here—at the Metropole, and I am going to see his wife. She has been ill, and as I understand she wants to come to this country, I think I must fetch her."

He drank off the tea in a draught. Sybil, wide-eyed, gazed at him.

"Again to New York," she said. "Must you?" Horror was in her face and in her tone. Æneas saw and heard, but ignored both.

"Obviously," was his only rejoinder.

Again they looked at one another; then in a business-like tone of voice he said: "I really must be off now. I start early to-morrow, and there is a lot to settle and arrange. Take care of yourself: and good-bye."

"Oh, Æneas!" Sybil did not move, but she clasped her hands, and looked untold things. Then she ended inconsequently: "I want your mother; most dreadfully I want your mother!"

"Well, go to her then, my dear! . . . My dear!" he said.

The door opened and closed. He had gone.

CHAPTER XXV

DROON again! The stately *White Lady* in the bay with the blue hills sentinel behind her. Peace and fresh air: though not very fine weather.

"Such a pity now," said Robina, "to have wasted that spell o' sunshine in a place like London!"

"Only it rained all the time up here then, they say! Now, Robina, look at the bright side of things! We got the London sunshine, and we are back in time for our turn of it up here—when that comes. We've managed famously!"

Robina smiled.

"Indeed," she said, "I'm so thankfu' to get ye safe away from that nasty town and back again; I'll not grumble at anything at all!"

"Poor old dear! you did hate it: didn't you?"

"I did that, m'ledy."

The reply was very emphatic.

"And so, what is it to be?" Mr. Morrison asked, when Sybil went to see him. "I wonder where you are going to live. Have you finished your prospecting and made your plans? What did you think of the women's settlements?"

"I'm ashamed of myself," she answered. "I begged you to get all that information, and those addresses, and I never went near one of them! What *will* you say to me?"

He smiled. And she continued—speaking slowly and rather low—a dreamy look in her eyes.

"But I saw people, Mr. Morrison: a very great many people. I went into streets, and courts, and houses such as I did not dream existed: and now I know that what you told me was true—I mean what you said about my lot being cast in the pleasant places. But I was right over one thing; it was right for me to go away: to leave the pleasant places for that short space. I don't quite know how to express myself; I cannot explain to you what I have learned." She paused. She was

speaking very carefully and humbly—anxious to arrive at and convey her meaning. "Learned is not the right word; better to say I begin to guess something of what there is to learn. Through these people, and through my feeling for them, I have anyway got hold of one thing I never had hold of before; and I could never feel important again! My troubles *did* seem so immense and overwhelming. Yet what a ridiculous infinitesimal niche we fill—those troubles and I!" She looked across at that wise, beautiful face opposite.

"I wonder if one comes to God through people," she said. "What do you think? After all 'in His own image created He them!'"

Mr. Morrison said nothing for a moment, and Sybil watched him, and recollected vaguely how Fräulein Brentmann declared every peculiarity to be intolerable. No one, Fräulein Brentmann said, should have a trick or any peculiarity. True, in the main. Yet it seemed to Sybil that Mr. Morrison would not be himself if—as a preliminary to speech—that thin hand ceased to move the silky white hair. She watched for the hand to be lifted: after

that he would answer her. The answer came at last in the form of a quotation, without any comment from him:

"No one could tell me where my Soul might be,
I searched for God: but God eluded me.
I sought my Brother out and found—all three."

* * * * *

It was nearly a week after her arrival at Droon before Sybil—although all the time anxious to do so—made up her mind to write to Lady Monteith. She had—as she had told Æneas—a curious craving to see that lady; and yet she hesitated—half afraid to be with her.

When Lady Monteith answered it was to say that she and the Judge were on their way to London, to meet Æneas and Mrs. Quintin, who were coming over immediately. A little later she hoped they might be able to arrange a visit to Droon. Somehow the letter caused Sybil a pang. It was kindness itself, but it brought a realization of the fact that she—who stood in truth so near—was yet apart. Æneas's life was all apart from her. . . .

For Lady Monteith, too, the time was trying.

Mrs. Quintin wished to go direct to the Metropole: she wished to occupy the suite of rooms her husband had had. To the Metropole accordingly Lord and Lady Monteith also went.

"I wish," Lady Monteith said, "one had the faintest notion of what kind of person to expect. Oh, Leslie, the whole thing is a nightmare! Why need we have met them? I wonder at Æneas asking it. It is sure to be so terribly painful, and how can one comfort a perfect stranger?"

The Judge smiled.

"You are the culprit," he said. "Come now; Æneas did not suggest our meeting them."

"No, neither he did!" She laughed at herself. "I want to do it; my real self wishes to meet them. My darling boy—of course I wish to meet him; and the poor wife, poor thing indeed! If we are to be so close; if Lois is well, and is indeed to be our daughter! Leslie—Oh, what's the time? Will they be here soon?

"Any moment now," said the Judge.

They were waiting in their own sitting-room, and she walked to the window, and looked out

into Northumberland Avenue. It was gloomy enough. Rain poured down, splashing on to the pavement with almost tropical force; very few people were about. She stood still and looked, moving the tassel of the blind aimlessly from one hand to the other, nervously dreading the arrival of this lady in such trouble—this lady for whom she felt so strange a mixture of pity and aversion. And Lois was the lady's daughter and Æneas's wife! The thought of Æneas's wife was unendurable.

There was a sound. . . . Lord Monteith called her by name; she turned.

Æneas was in the room, and it struck his mother—just as it had struck Sybil when he stood in her sitting-room that Sunday morning—how grave and tall he looked. Leaning on his arm was a lady of medium height in deepest mourning. Her veil was thrown back, her face extremely pitiful—white and delicate and sad.

"My mother—Mrs. Quintin," said Æneas. "My father."

There was no scene, no tears, no allusions to anything whatsoever. Mrs. Quintin's dignity and self-control were absolute.

"It is very kind indeed of you to have travelled to London to greet me, so I understand from Æneas. I very greatly appreciate your kindness.

Her nationality was unmistakable; the air of breeding quite unmistakable, too.

"A lady," said the Judge, when a few moments later she had left—with Æneas—to go to her own apartments. He hesitated a moment, then added: "I haven't told you yet—in fact, I only heard from Forbes this morning—that Mr. Quintin, by his will, has left the greater part of his fortune to Æneas. He has reversed the position—a yearly sum is settled upon Lois, and capital to the tune of three millions or more comes to Æneas."

Lady Monteith received the news in a characteristic manner.

"I wish we were not so beholden to them," she said one moment—and the next: "Oh, how thankful I am!"

CHAPTER XXVI

MRS. QUINTIN had seen Lois, had seen the doctors attending her. The recovery, if indeed it proved lasting and complete, was a remarkable one. Her memory—or, rather, loss of memory—constituted now the only difference between the existing Lois and the Lois whom Æneas had married. She remained passive, dreamy. All risk of shock must be avoided; they must be most careful for some time as yet. She should not be told of her father's death, and the doctors decided it would be best that, as yet she should not see her husband; neither must she risk the sea-voyage.

So Mrs. Quintin took a house—which happened to be to let—in the neighbourhood where Lois had spent these many months; and the transfer of herself and of her belongings to that house, and her mother's company, seemed

to afford the patient gentle happiness. Widow's weeds were discarded, that no questionings might suggest themselves; and Lois appeared oblivious of her mother's worn and aged appearance. She asked for no one and about nothing in connection with her old life.

On Mrs. Quintin the strain of all this unreality fell heavily; and she was much of an alien. Once before for a brief stay she had been in London, but this was her first introduction to English country life; she knew nothing of England and the English. Tied now in this manner to Lois, bereft of congenial companionship, the loneliness—the laying aside day by day and all the day, of this great living grief which weighed upon her heart—began to tell. Lord and Lady Monteith had been truly kind: they had begged that she and Lois should use their house as a home, and at any time propose themselves. . . . But there was the name Monteith—that name which might awaken agitating trains of thought, and test the balance of Lois's mind before the doctors wished it tested. There was the fact, too, that the Monteiths now were at their country-house close to North Berwick, where the Judge

indulged in his favourite game of golf. North Berwick she well knew to be a seaside place.

So one day Mrs. Quintin sat thinking—thinking deeply of the past. She laid out a panorama of her life before her eyes, and in the pattern—in the panorama—some of the figures were raised. Thirty odd years ago, five years or so before her marriage, a great preacher—an orator, indeed—had come to her home in Virginia. He was doing mission-work. His was one of the raised figures. "Why, one just had to believe in the truth of what he said—he just *knew*." The remembrance of him, and of certain sermons of his had never left her; he had been the first to set her thinking—searching after the Unseen. . . . Since that time she had wavered, turning this way and that, and last of all had joined the Christian Scientists; but she failed to grasp the underlying truth, the great realities of their teaching, and, in what she expected from it, Christian Science had grievously failed her.

"I wonder whether he has never swerved; whether his faith is just as strong and simple now? I wonder!"

They had never lost sight of one another

entirely, these two. Every now and again they wrote; it might be at an interval of years, but every now and again they wrote.

Mrs. Quintin stood up suddenly—a delightful idea had occurred to her. She had had a recollection.

She rang the bell.

"Where is Droon?" she inquired of the butler, who looked much puzzled. "It is a place," she added, "somewhere in Scotland, but I want to know just where."

He, however, could not inform her. An atlas was produced, but Droon could not be found.

Mrs. Quintin sat down and wrote a letter.

"DEAR MR. MORRISON,

"Here I am in England with my daughter, having been through a time of terrible trial and trouble. My dear husband passed away when I was not with him; my son, too, is gone. My heart is heavy. It would be such a great comfort to me to have a talk with you, and I would give much that my girl should know you. It seems great to me—this notion of going to you. Could you

receive us? or take rooms for us in some hotel near by? I cannot find Droon upon the atlas. How do we travel to you? to which station? If you can receive us we will come straight away. I trust you can.

"Dear friend, yours faithfully,

"CORDELIA F. QUINTIN."

"I am to have a great *event*—*ad*vent," laughed Mr. Morrison. "Imagine my entertaining visitors at Burnside! An old friend of mine—of Virginia days—has invited herself, and she is bringing her girl. Poor old Chirsty is in a whirl of excitement."

Sybil laughed.

"When do they come?" she said, "and how? By land or water?"

"They come by land the day after to-morrow."

"Shall the motor fetch them from the station?" she suggested.

But that he declined; all arrangements had been made.

"I'm quite sure you're short of nothing in that perfect little house, but if by any chance you were——"

"My dear lady! you would know of it at once."

"What a party we shall be for Droon all of a sudden!" she said, smiling. "Lord and Lady Monteith and their son come here from North Berwick to-morrow. Elizabeth and I are going in *The White Lady* to meet them at Oban. We must foregather soon."

"Ah, yes! Well, from my friend's letter to me I fear that she is in trouble; so she may wish to be very quiet. I must not make engagements till she arrives, anyhow."

"I'm *so* sorry. . . . We will be careful. We won't go to Burnside unless we are asked."

Mr. Morrison had been prompt in his answer to Mrs. Quintin's letter.

"It will be the greatest pleasure to me to see you once again, and if you do not find my cottage uncomfortable and too small, I hope you will make it your headquarters," he wrote. "There is a little hotel close to the station, but it is nearly ten miles from me. I shall meet you. The hotel motor, which is a comfortable one, will get us here in no time. We shall drive chiefly by the moorland road, but

this little house, 'Burnside,' is tucked in just below the moor, sheltered, and in a small wood. You will like it perhaps." And so on.

The letter dispelled the only fear which remained at the back of Mrs. Quintin's mind —the fear lest Droon, like North Berwick, should be on the sea. Clearly it was not; he spoke only of moors. She thought no more of the matter, but awaited with almost child-like impatience the time when they should start.

Thus Fate mustered her pawns for the final move.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was a Wednesday, the day on which Lois and her mother reached Droon. They travelled by night, but coming by the railway (as people were obliged to do who had not yachts), they did not arrive at this station, which was off the main line, until near two o'clock, and Mr. Morrison had arranged for lunch at the hotel.

The sight of Mrs. Quintin came as a shock and a surprise to him. When visualizing her, his mind had travelled to far Virginia, to her home there; to the sunniness of her, the prettiness of her!—and here was the reality! A careworn old lady! At her fifty-five years older even than he, who was nearing eighty.

She laid her hands in his.

"Why!" she cried, "for all your white hair, it is just you yourself, Mr. Morrison. Oh, I wish *he* could have known you!" she

added very low, and then she turned: "And this is Lois. Lois dear, this is Mr. Morrison."

Lois provided a further surprise. Mrs. Quintin had written of "my girl," and somehow he had expected a girl, fourteen or fifteen years of age. He was totally unprepared for the appearance of this strange, exotic-looking woman and a maid, and *such* trunks! How was all this to be conveyed to Burnside? and how housed, once there?

He made hasty arrangements with the hotel for providing an additional waggonette to take the maid and luggage, though they could not do so till the late afternoon, and he thought with some despair of his elderly, anxious-minded housekeeper. Perhaps it was just as well that everything and everyone should not arrive together.

Mrs. and Miss Quintin (so he called her) appeared to be leisurely in their habits — so long they took over luncheon—so slow they were in making any move. It was half-past four before the car had landed them at Burnside, where tea awaited them.

"Why, we have so many meals!" Lois said; and she smiled. Her mother thrilled. The

smile, the quite uncalled-for speech, were very unusual. Perhaps it was Mr. Morrison's personality quickening something in her: that might be so—that might be.

"One wants meals, you'll find, in this good air, Miss Quintin."

But Lois was not hungry. She merely drank a cup of tea. Then:

"I should like to rest," she announced. "I should like to go up to my room and rest."

"You are sure, dear, that is what you wish? You are quite sure?"

It would be so nice to be alone with Mr. Morrison—it was so much what Mrs. Quintin wished, that she had an uneasy suspicion of selfishness.

But Lois was certain. She was rather tired, and would be glad to sleep a little before the luggage came, and had to be unpacked; so her mother left her lying on a bed hung with fresh white dimity curtains—lying still, and with closed eyes. She bent and kissed her.

Lois looked up.

"Dear mamma!" she suddenly said. It was so astounding, it brought a quick gush of tears to the mother's eyes; but Lois had again closed hers, and saw nothing.

Then Mrs. Quintin passed downstairs—into the little den of which Sybil was so fond—and settled herself, for the coveted talk with her old friend.

The shooting at Droon was not good; no trouble had been taken about it; still, there were a few grouse to be had, and Lord Monteith and Æneas had been out after them that Wednesday.

Now tea was over. The deserted tea-table stood on the wide flagged terrace, outside the opened windows of the library. On the ground lay a bear-skin rug, upon which Elizabeth—who had joined the tea-party—had been seated; and whence the dilapidated monkey, unfortunately left behind, now turned its one round glassy eye in reproach, towards the nursery window.

Lord Monteith had gone in to attend to his correspondence. Lady Monteith had gone with him, because she always did go with him, whenever and wherever she possibly could. Æneas and Sybil were left alone for the first time since his arrival.

They strolled across to the ramparts, walking

from one end to the other, and then back from the west eastwards. The outline of the square was broken—near the centre of that eastern side—by a piece of wall, and by an out-jutting tower: originally the Castle had extended in this direction. Æneas walked round to the far side of the tower, and Sybil followed.

"Jove!" he said, "how the tropæolum does grow in these parts, to be sure!"

The piece of grey wall and tower were hung with thick festoons of this brilliant little red flower.

"Yes; isn't it wonderful?" She leaned—half sitting on the low rampart—and touched the flowers lightly with her finger-tips. "It reminds me; I never told you, Æneas, about a woman I saw in London. She had been a dressmaker, but everything had failed, and now she lodges in Limehouse."

"In Limehouse!" he exclaimed. "Why in Limehouse?"

"Oh, just because she originally knew something about the people who kept the house. I forget the reason precisely; but she had one. What I was going to tell you is that I asked her whether she would like me to send her

flowers every week, or whether she would rather have a fashion-paper. Which do you suppose she chose?"

"The fashion-paper?"

"Yes. . . . I send her both. The flowers went as a sort of salve to my own conscience; and now sometimes I worry over them. The flowers—poor little lovely things!—they can't like going to Limehouse."

"Oh, Sybil, Sybil, you direful sentimentalist!"

Then he also sat upon the wall.

"I wonder," he said, "if you would tell me what you were doing in those places? What made you go there? Or is this an indiscreet question?"

"I don't know," she said. "I think very likely it is indiscreet . . . but I'm always indiscreet, so I'll answer it. I went because I wanted to work, and to forget myself a little. I was so unhappy, Æneas: and I thought perhaps if one knew more about other people, and could do a little to help them, it might make one forget. That was why I went to those places. That is why, one day, I shall go there again. And then, too, I wanted—I

knew I could not see you—but I wanted to be in the same town with you." The words came simply.

"My dear!" he murmured, bending a trifle towards her.

She continued, speaking in a rather dull, expressionless manner:

"The night I went to the Temple, I went to look at where you lived; but I did think—I did most truly think—that you were certain not to be there just then."

"*Lois has regained her reason.*" Again these words knelled through his brain.

"Sybil," he said, "we must not, we dare not, let ourselves think and feel these things. I have not even the freedom of a man who is married to an ordinary woman. If my wife is sane once more, I must not drive her mad again." His voice was hard — was almost fierce. "And she is; you didn't know it, but she is sane; and I must cherish and protect her. All the same"— he rose, and his breath came hard; Sybil, quivering, rose too—"all the same, this once I mean to hold you in my arms—this once I mean to kiss you."

He caught her rather roughly; she closed her eyes and swayed towards him. For her no world but this existed; she was intoxicated by her longing for him. She neither heard nor saw; but he—just as his lips were about to touch her mouth, whilst she lay there in his arms—he raised his eyes. His clasp was loosened; he pushed her from him, moving away from her—ahead of her; craning forward.

"God in heaven!" he whispered hoarsely; "Lois!"

Down the centre pathway Lois stepped quickly; the round projecting tower, which sheltered them, had prevented her from being seen till she was near the ramparts. She was hatless, her arms stretched out. She called aloud, with triumph in her tone:

"The sea again! At last the sea! Nathaniel—oh, Nathaniel! here I come!"

Æneas saw in a flash what was about to happen. He sprang forward.

"Lois!" he called. "*Stop!*"

She did not pause—she did not hear. She laid her hand upon the rampart wall, and with a bound was over it.

"Don't, don't, *don't* let her drown! Quick! Quick!"

Sybil, too, had rushed forward.

She need not have hastened him, and the flash of his body through the air, diving into the deep water below, came fast enough—came with terrifying rapidity.

"Help!" Sybil shouted.

It was a cry indeed. It startled the Judge; it startled all who heard it. She herself ran with incredible swiftness to the boathouse, unchained and launched a skiff, rowed it, with firm strokes and fast, round the square walls out into deep water.

Thank God Æneas was there! Thank God she saw him swimming! He, at least, had steered clear of the rocks.

From *The White Lady* boats were lowered too. They searched and searched; for hours—till far into the night, they searched—and still "lay by."

For two days Sybil was ill; the sickening fright and horror had unnerved her. . . . She was racked with headache and neuralgia—

beside herself with pain; but it ended—the pain did—as suddenly as it had begun. Lady Monteith, sitting beside her sofa in the boudoir, then told her what she herself had learned; told her of Lois, left, as they thought, asleep; of Mrs. Quintin and Mr. Morrison, talking absorbedly—so that they neither heard her move, nor saw her go out. The maid, who shared with Mrs. Quintin the constant watch on Lois, had been belated; and the servants at Burnside, although they saw Lois go, attached, of course, no importance to the matter. She must have caught sight of the sea from the moor above, and followed the quickest pathway to it, which led through the Castle grounds. The sight of it, just as the doctors had feared, brought back remembrance—brought back the tragedy of her brother's death, and once again unhinged her mind.

"It wrung my heart," Lady Monteith said, "seeing Mrs. Quintin and talking to her; it seems that when the brother was drowned she had dreaded lest Lois's ceaseless fretting should lead to insanity. But her husband and

her Christian Science friends all told her—and firmly believed—that such a thing could never be; and the doctor to whom she confided her fears had reassured her too, and said that marriage, when it came, would put everything quite right. So they were longing for Lois to marry and be happy; and then it only led to misery! Mrs. Quintin says that all this just killed her husband. Poor, poor thing, what a tragedy it is for her, to be sure! Ah well! we must all try to comfort her now. Æneas will be wonderful; he always is."

Sybil did not ask to see Æneas. A sense of shyness—almost of guilt—made her dread seeing him, although she longed to.

But on the morning of the third day he came. When the handle of the door turned—whilst he was still outside—she knew who it was.

"I may come in?" he asked.

For some unknown reason tears sprang to her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. She was standing; she sat down weakly on the nearest chair.

"Oh!" she said, "don't speak of anything! Do you know—really—I can't bear anything more!"

"My own sweetheart!" he said, and knelt beside her, gathering her hands in his. "Please God, there will be little more to bear!"

THE END

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